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L E C T U R E S,
EXPLANATORY AND PRACTICAL,
ON THE
E P I S T L E O F S T. P A U L
TO THE
P H I L I P P I A N S.

INTENDED CHIEFLY FOR THE USE OF FAMILIES.

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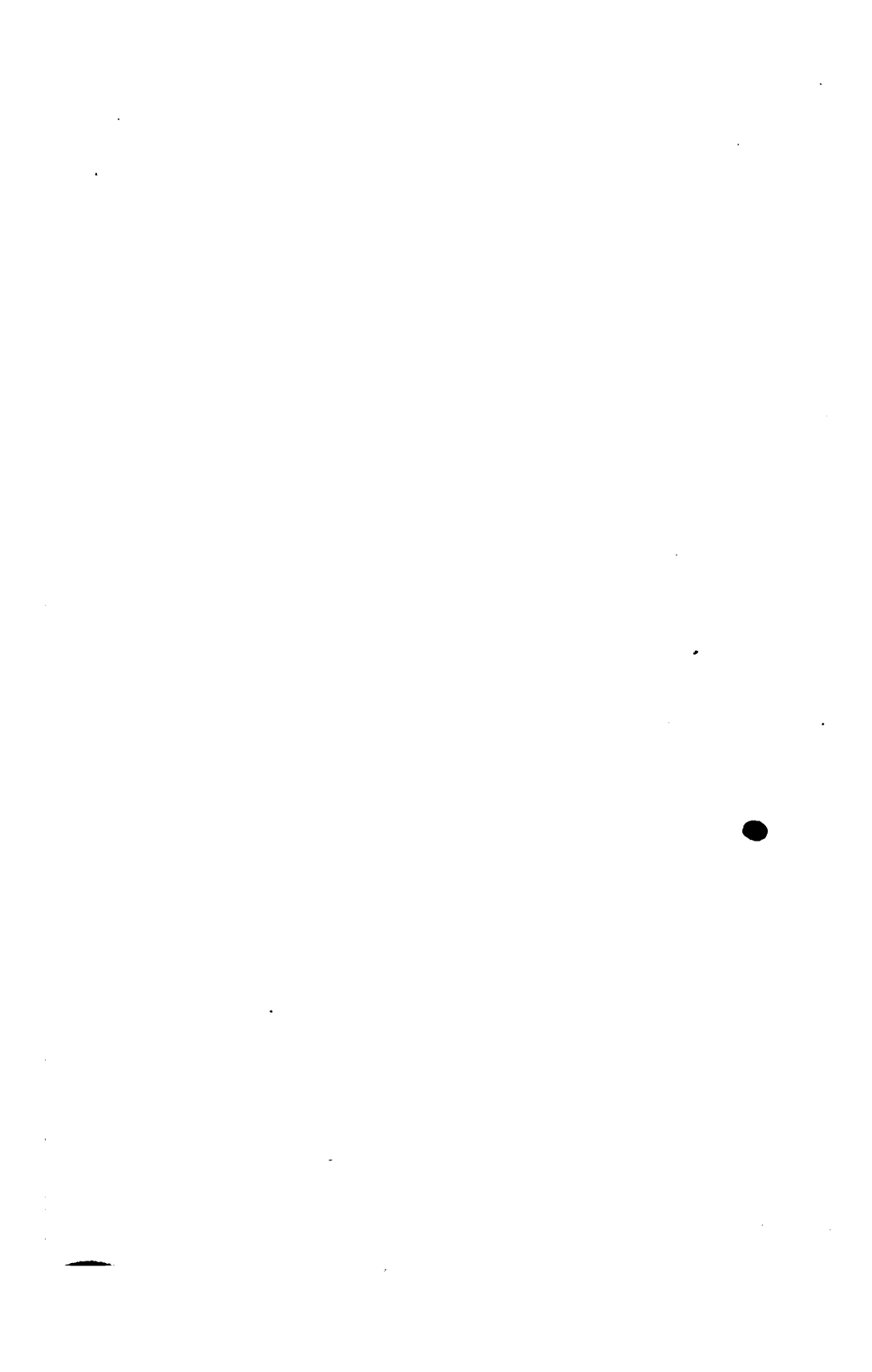
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TO
THE PARISHIONERS
OF
THE CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION, NEW YORK,
THE FOLLOWING
LECTURES,
ORIGINALLY DELIVERED IN THEIR PRESENCE,
ARE,
WITH FERVENT PRAYERS FOR THEIR ETERNAL WELFARE,
INSCRIBED BY
THEIR AFFECTIONATE FRIEND AND MINISTER,
THE AUTHOR.

4-20-37 LNB



P R E F A C E .

THE Lectures contained in this Volume were composed in the winter of 1829-30; and delivered, during the same period, on successive Sunday mornings, from the pulpit of Ascension Church, New York. The writer has been led to believe, that they might be found useful beyond the limited sphere of his own parochial cure; and the reasons which have induced him to offer them to the public, he would, in a few words, state.

Notwithstanding the great variety of books in existence, designed for religious *family reading*, it will, perhaps, be allowed, that more are yet to be desired. The object contemplated in such works is one of so useful a character, as to justify constant

additions to the number of those already in circulation. In one particular respect, the following pages may possibly be found convenient for domestic use. It is the custom with many, on the recurring occasions of Sunday evening family worship, to take advantage of the greater leisure then enjoyed, by adding to the ordinary quantity of scriptural reading. In committing these Lectures to the press, no addition has been made to their original length, as delivered from the pulpit: by their brevity, therefore, they avoid a danger which should always be carefully guarded against,—that of fatiguing, instead of interesting, the assembled domestic circle; and thus defeating the grand object of spiritual edification.

Whatever may be thought, however, of the suitability of the present Volume to occasions like those referred to, the author has thought that he might serve the cause of Christ, by placing in the hands of the members of families a work, devoted to *the practical illustration of the word of God*. In this age of wild speculation on religious subjects, every attempt to lead the mind to that pure and

undefiled fountain of truth, which is contained in the Bible, seems, whatever may be its merits in other respects, to be of itself a commendable endeavor. As the object proposed, in the first delivery of these Lectures, was general usefulness, and as they are now published with the same design, the reader will find the present work to be wholly of a practical character. Criticism is made use of no further than was absolutely necessary, for the purpose of elucidating phraseology, or of unfolding the beauties of a passage in a more impressive aspect to the mind.

In regard to that particular portion of Scripture, which forms the subject of these explanatory Lectures, it seems hardly necessary to speak. For tenderness, simplicity, and beauty, the Epistle to the Philippians stands preeminent. But, besides this, in the course of the four Chapters of which it is composed, it affords, to him who is illustrating it, an opportunity of enforcing not only all the fundamental points of Christian faith, but also a great variety of precepts in relation to a believer's daily practice.

While the writer is most ardently attached to that branch of the Church of Christ, with which he accounts it his happiness and privilege to be united, he believes, at the same time, that nothing will be found in the present Volume, to which all cannot cordially subscribe, who "love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." He has kept constantly in view those distinguishing features of practical and experimental religion, in which all Christians agree ; and has thus rendered his work suitable for general circulation.

He can only, in conclusion, commend this humble attempt to advance the Redeemer's kingdom, to the blessing of that divine Master, whom he has been called to serve in the ministry of the gospel.

New York, May, 1833.

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LECTURE I.

CHAPTER I. 1—6.

Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

WHEN the Apostle began the composition of this letter to the believers of Philippi, he was under the influence of that most affecting recollection, that he had been the instrument, under Providence, of their conversion "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." While St. Paul was at Troas, he beheld in the night, as we are informed in the sixteenth chapter of the Acts, the vision of a man of Macedonia; who, in a supplicating voice, cried, "Come over into Macedonia, and help us." The summons was immediately obeyed; the gospel was proclaimed, in all its grace and fullness, to the inhabitants of that unenlightened region; and among those who, at Philippi, were brought to a knowledge

of the way of life, we find the two instances of the jailer and of Lydia particularly recorded in history. It may well be supposed, that the Apostle ever afterwards looked upon this church which his own hands had planted, with feelings of peculiar tenderness and affection. The Philippians were his children in the Lord ; and the emotions with which the faithful minister of Christ Jesus thinks of those, whom God has given him as the recompense of his labors, and the seals of his apostleship, are more clearly to be felt than described. It was with such associations that the mind of St. Paul was crowded, when, embracing the opportunity afforded by the departure of Epaphroditus from Rome to Philippi, he penned this interesting communication. The great Apostle was now in imprisonment for the gospel of Christ. The Philippians, anxious to alleviate, as far as possible, the sufferings of their spiritual father, had sent the person just named, with a supply of money for his relief : and now that the messenger of their bounty was about to return, he determined to acknowledge their goodness ; to express his interest in their eternal welfare ; and to offer them such counsel and admonitions, as might, by the blessing of God, animate them to run with new faith and patience the "race that was set before them."

The Epistle opens, according to the customary apostolic method, with an invocation of spiritual blessings.—"Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons : Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ." You perceive that, in this commencing salutation, the name of Timothy is associated with that of the Apostle ; a circumstance which may seem strange,

when taken in connexion with the fact, that St. Paul was the single composer of this letter to the Philippian church. The reason, however, for this union will readily be seen, by turning to that portion of the Acts, which describes the first preaching of the gospel to the inhabitants of Philippi.* It appears, from the narrative there given, that Timothy was one of those who assisted the Apostle, in proclaiming in that city the glad tidings of salvation. It is also intimated, in another part of the apostolic history,† that he was one of St. Paul's companions on a subsequent visit to that same region ; so that the name of Timothy must have become endeared to these primitive converts, by many soothing and grateful recollections of his personal ministry. It is on account of his former intimacy, therefore, with those believers to whom the Apostle was writing, that this excellent servant of Christ, now at Rome, was united with the author in these expressions of love and friendship. Their words of greeting are addressed not only to the Philippian Christians in general, but also, as you observe, to their "bishops," or, spiritual overseers, "and deacons;" who had, in all probability, merited this especial commemoration, by their activity in raising for the imprisoned Apostle the needful supplies. In regard to the form in which this opening benediction is expressed, it is precisely the same with that which is used in most of the other New Testament Epistles ; and for its beautiful simplicity, its affection, and the comprehensiveness of its meaning, it certainly deserves a passing consideration. "Grace be unto you;" or, in other words, may the favor of God, and all the varied gifts and blessings of the gospel, be multiplied to you in rich abundance :

* Acts, xvi.

† Acts, xx.

"and peace," that is, the divine contentment, happiness, and joy, which flow from a state of reconciliation with the Father—a sense of inward tranquillity—that rest of the believing heart, "which passeth all understanding." It is also worthy of your attention, that these spiritual privileges are described as proceeding "from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ:" and the Apostle hereby points out, my brethren, the only source from which pardon and acceptance are derived to sinful and ruined man. The King of heaven bestows these benefits, singly through the atoning sacrifice and merits of his "dear Son;" this Mediator is the exclusive channel by which they can descend; and, apart from his precious death, there is no possession of the divine favor, and no covenant union with God as a pacified Parent and Friend.—And now, let me request you, after this brief explanation of the Apostle's first salutatory verses, to bestow a moment's meditation upon the nature of that affectionate prayer which they contain. St. Paul, about to convey to his absent friends some expression of his regard, begins with an ardent wish and supplication in respect to them: and what *are* these blessings which he implores? Does he ask the Author of all mercy to vouchsafe to them the temporal comforts of life? Does he desire that their corn, and wine, and oil, may be increased? Such benefits he considered, undoubtedly, as having their proper value, upon the principle which he himself has, in another place, set forth; that "every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving."* So immeasurably superior, however, he had learned to deem those eternal blessings, which the cross of the Redeemer had pur-

* I. Tim. iv. 4.

chased for men, that every thing of a merely earthly nature seems insignificant in his eye. He rises above the transitory privileges of a present world; he scarcely considers them as worth a petition; and when he would invoke from heaven, upon these distant Philippians, the choicest of gifts, the enjoyment of God's favor through Christ presents itself as the single object to be valued and desired. Learn here, therefore, *the true estimate of temporal possessions*; and be instructed, as you read the benediction, "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

The Apostle, having thus, according to his usual method, opened his communication with expressions of good-will and affection, proceeds to state to these Philippians the gratitude and pleasure, with which he beheld their steadfast walk in the faith and holiness of the gospel. This interesting idea is contained in the third, fourth, and fifth verses; and is thus expressed. "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day," that is, from the period of your conversion, "until now." By the expression "fellowship in the gospel," is to be understood the continued participation of the Philippian converts, from the time when they first became disciples, in the graces and heavenly character of the religion of Jesus: according to the use of the term by the same Apostle, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, where he observes, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord;"* or, in other words, through whose infinite mercy ye were made partakers of that gospel of salvation,

* I. Cor. i. 9.

of which our adorable Saviour is the Author and the Finisher. The whole meaning, therefore, of St. Paul, in the verses before us, may be thus briefly stated. You never enter into my thoughts, my dearly beloved friends, without calling forth ascriptions of devoutest praise to the God of all mercy : and, as often as, bending my knees before the throne of grace, I offer up my petitions for your present and eternal welfare, I am overwhelmed with delight at the thought, that, through divine grace, you have thus far persevered in the way of life; neither seduced by the corrupt opinions and principles of men—nor reverting to the idolatry from which you have escaped—nor abandoning the cross of the Lord Jesus amidst the violence of persecution.—It is worthy of remark, my brethren, how frequently the Apostle, on other occasions, is found rejoicing at the increase of believers in the knowledge and practice of the gospel. Thus, in his Epistle to the Romans, “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.”* And again in his letter to the Colossians, he declares, “We give thanks to God and the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints.”† In this expression of his joy, however, at the spiritual walk and conversation of the Philippians, there is an unusual warmth of feeling ; and this arose from the touching circumstance, that they were brethren to whom he had once preached, in his own person, the unsearchable riches of the kingdom. The inspired Apostle, therefore, was gladdened at the spectacle of their faith and consistency, not merely from that anxiety which

* Rom. i. 8.

† Col. i. 3. 4.

he felt, in general, for the everlasting salvation of men, but because they were his own children, begotten in the gospel of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Considered in this view, as the declaration of St. Paul's affectionate interest in the objects of his former ministry, the language now under consideration suggests one or two reflections, of an affecting and profitable character.

And 1. Is there not something, my beloved hearers, calculated most powerfully to impress your hearts, in the view here exhibited *of that solicitude, with which every faithful minister of Christ watches the progress of his spiritual fold?*—Let me direct your attention, once more, to the representation of the Apostle before us. He hears of the members of this distant church, among whom he had once “gone preaching the kingdom of God,”* that they are still pressing onward to the mark, for the prize of their high calling. And what is the effect of these tidings? His heart overflows with gladness; and, in the rapture of his emotions, he sends upward to heaven, whenever these children of his care cross his recollection, ejaculations of thankfulness and joy. Now the great Apostle of the Gentiles has furnished, in this statement of his own experience, an example of what all feel, who have been truly called by a gracious Providence to “the work of the ministry.” The highest comfort and pleasure which a faithful ambassador of Christ enjoys, is to observe that any of those among whom he labors are indeed “walking in truth;”† and the spectacle of a people separated from the world, warmed with the love of Christ, and marching onward with undeviating step to a better country, fills him with emo-

* Acts, xx. 25.

† I. John, v. 4.

tions which none of this world's objects ever can enkindle. Permit me, then, to present this truth to those within the congregation before me, "who profess and call themselves Christians," as an incitement to perseverance in the life of God, and to higher attainments in holiness. Are there some among you, my friends and brethren, who, through divine grace, have forsaken the corruptions that are in the world; and who, having been led by the mercies, and by the chastisements of Providence, to live near to the Author of all peace and happiness, are humbly seeking to "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing," to be "fruitful in every good work," and to "increase in the knowledge of God?"* Let it be some encouragement to your future labors after a closer walk with the Lord, and a more entire consecration to his service, to reflect that he who watches for your souls, as one that must give account, is marking your steady career; that he is in secret blessing the Fountain of all good, for those measures of grace to which you have as yet attained; and, in prospect of your growing ripeness for heaven, daily "rejoices with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." The believer, it is true, proposes to himself the love and favor of God, as the grand stimulus to animate him on his pilgrimage; but, notwithstanding this, we are warranted, by the example of the Apostle before us, in holding it forth as a legitimate encouragement to his perseverance, that he beneath whose ministrations he is sitting, smiles with new joy, at every fresh accession of faith, and love and holiness, among those to whom he "publisheth salvation."

There is *another* reflection suggested by the words of St. Paul now under consideration, upon which I may profitably,

* Col. i. 10

for a few moments, fix your thoughts. The Apostle, you perceive, while expressing to these believers of Philippi his interest in their welfare, makes incidental mention of the fact, that that church of his own planting *formed one of the subjects of his constant prayers*. Turn again to the inspired writer's language. "Always," he declares, "in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy:" and, while exhibiting this habitual remembrance before God of the people of his ministry, as a sample of the practice of every sincere shepherd, allow me to offer the circumstances to the meditation of those before me, who are living without an interest in that gospel of mercy, which is so repeatedly presented to their acceptance. My brethren, there are some amongst you who come, at the commencement of every successive week, within the sound of the message of salvation; who listen to its affectionate invitations: who hear its threatened judgments: and, after each of these appeals, go forth again to bury themselves in the pursuits of life—to mingle in its engrossing pleasures—and, amidst visible things, to banish God and the Saviour from all influence over the heart, and from all place within the memory. To such "forgetful hearers," it may, perhaps, not be unprofitable to urge the impressive statement just presented; and to say, that, amidst all your heedlessness of the way of life, and your devotion to those things whose end is death, there is one who bears you on his petitions to the throne of mercy; who prays daily for your spiritual illumination; who thinks, with sighs and tears, for those who, in the blindness of their imaginations, never think for themselves. This individual who thus implores in retirement for your salvation,

* James, i. 25.

is he who, by the appointment of Providence, proclaims to you in public, within these sacred walls, the message of love ; and there is something in this consideration, so calculated to appeal to all the better feelings of the sinner's heart, that I cannot refrain from pressing it upon your contemplation. Where, among those that, in this sanctuary, stately listen to the preached word, is the person who, unmindful of these truths, is given up in heart and practice to the vain pageantry of life ? Be melted at the thought, that he who ministers to you in holy things is, with every day's succession, entreating the Lord of heaven, that, of his mercy, he will turn you from these ensnaring idols, to serve the living and true God. Where is the attendant upon these means of grace, who, when he retires from them into the world, is led away by the absorbing quest of gain ? Think of him, whose voice utters your name in secret before the Hearer of prayer ; and let the recollection lead you, through divine grace, to give your whole heart to Christ ; to embrace the gospel, and to bow, as a willing captive, to the obedience of the truth. Where is the profane despiser of those solemn representations, which are unfolded by the messengers of Jesus, and in the pages of his word ? My dear hearer, even you are not forgotten in our daily supplications ; we ask that your eyes may be opened, to see the wondrous things of the gospel ; and the tenderness of such a thought may, perhaps, one day, subdue your callous heart beneath the influences of the Spirit of God. Call to mind, amidst the cares and the frivolities of life, the fact, that he who invites you to Christ from this watch-tower of Sion, is petitioning for your rescue in the intercessions of the closet. Let it bring you to thought. Let it arrest your wandering

steps. Let it win you to that Fountain of living waters, whom you have been forsaking to hew out for yourselves "broken cisterns, that can hold no water."*

After this kind expression of his thankfulness, for the spiritual attainments of these his children in the Lord, St. Paul proceeds, in the last verse of the portion under review, to state an additional reason for his grateful joy on their account.—It is derived from the humble, but firm persuasion, that the same grace which, in past days, had brought them to a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, and had kept them thus far in the way of life, would carry them to the end in safety; and would bless their earnest prayers after the faith and holiness of the gospel. "Being confident," the Apostle declares, "of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ," that is, until the termination of life; for the Apostle here uses the period of the last judgment instead of the hour of death, from a desire, manifested in various other portions of his writings, to keep ever before the view that day of irreversible retribution for the wicked, and of signal triumph for the believer. The idea, then, which St. Paul intends to convey, in the declaration before us, is simply this: that, in view of the all-sufficient grace of the Redeemer, he felt cheered with the prospect of their future destiny; that he could safely leave them in the guidance of Christ's sanctifying Spirit; and was persuaded, that nothing would, or could be wanting, on the part of Him "from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed," to perfect their growth in grace, and fit them for his kingdom of glory. The words before us, therefore, are, as you

* Jer. ii. 13.

perceive, a lively testimony, such as all the true servants of the Lord Jesus delight to render, to that divine strength which is made perfect in the sinner's weakness: and, considered in this view, they are similar to that declaration of the same Apostle, in one of his epistles to Timothy, "For I know whom I have believed; and I am persuaded, that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."^{*}

Having thus explained the meaning of the Apostle's declaration, I cannot bring to a better conclusion the present Lecture, than by fixing your minds upon the important truth here stated: that it is the free, unmerited, and exclusive grace of God, which begins the renewed life of the Christian, carries it onward in its progress, and finally conducts it to "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." My beloved brethren, it is to the last degree needful, that, in order to be kept in a state of humble gratitude, and self-renouncing dependence upon the strength of Jesus, you should have constantly in remembrance this salutary doctrine: for it is the tendency of the human mind to be continually losing the impression, and to turn inward for support and confidence upon its own beggarly resources. Are there any, then, within these courts of the Lord this morning, who, through mercy, have been led from the world and its courses into the paths of peace and happiness? Acknowledge the power that has brought you hither; confess, with the full and entire feeling of the Apostle, "By the grace of God I am what I am;"[†] and turn upward to the same heavenly fountain, and to this alone, for strength in days to come. Is there here present the solicitous inquirer after the way of life; one who is walking in darkness, and

^{*} II. Tim. i. 12.

[†] I. Cor. xv. 10.

can see no light ; and who, disappointed in his own impotent endeavors, is ready to faint under the struggle ? My dear hearer, learn, first of all, the lesson here taught in God's holy word. Cease from all expectation in yourselves : look above, and there only : and with bended knees, and supplicating voice, put forth the cry, " Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me ! " Such is the wholesome inference to be drawn from these words of inspiration. May the Lord give us all the grace to apply it ; and drive us to the footstool of Jesus with the Apostle's exclamation, " Lord, to whom shall we go ? thou hast the words of eternal life."

LECTURE II.

CHAPTER I. 7—11.

Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart ; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace. For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment ; That ye may approve things that are excellent ; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

THE Apostle, having expressed to the Philippian believers, as you have already seen, his thankfulness for their spiritual attainments ; and the joy with which he thought of them, and offered up his petitions on their behalf at the throne of grace ; proceeds, in the portion now to be considered, to state his reason for this estimate of their character : to renew his professions of regard : and, in addition to all this, to convey to them the assurance of his prayers for their growth “in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Let us follow the inspired writer through the interesting and instructive verses, which are here presented for our consideration.

After having declared to the Philippians, in such unreserved and fervent language, his sense of the genuineness of their Christian profession, St. Paul adds very naturally, in the seventh verse, a brief view of the *evidence* they had afforded of their sincerity. He thus expresses himself. "Even as it is meet," or reasonable, "for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace." He intends, in these words, to say, that those to whom he was writing stood deservedly high in his esteem, because they had endeared themselves to his affections by one irresistible proof of their Christian love; namely, that, during all his trials for the gospel's sake, his imprisonment, his labors for the establishment of divine truth in the hearts of men, they had ever manifested a sympathetic interest in the difficulties of his ministerial course. This meaning of the language before us will be more clearly perceived, by attending, for a moment, to some of the terms used by the Apostle. He here speaks, you perceive, of his "bonds;" referring evidently to the confinement he was then enduring in the capital of the Roman empire. In addition to this affliction, he mentions his obstacles and hardships "in the defence and confirmation of the gospel;" alluding to his public preaching of the doctrines of the cross, in the face of cavilling philosophers, and persecuting men in power. In respect to these two kinds of suffering, the maintenance of Christ's truth amidst enemies, and the loss of personal liberty, he declares that the members of the Philippian church were "all partakers of his grace." The word "grace" is used, in several places, by St. Paul, in the sense of his office as a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, in

the Epistle to the Romans, he observes, "Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God, that I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles."^{*} So, likewise, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."[†] When he declares, therefore, that of this his calling as an ambassador of heaven the Philippians were "partakers," he obviously means, that, by their anxiety respecting him when deprived of freedom, and their sympathy with his feelings while in the discharge of his arduous duties, they were actually sharers, in common with himself, of the numerous trials and discouragements of his ministerial office.

It appears, then, that when the Apostle, in the verses to which your attention was invited in the last Lecture, exulted in the Christian graces of these fellow-disciples, it was not without reasonable grounds. Through the various griefs to which he had been exposed, their hearts had always been with him; they had given him their daily prayers; in all his afflictions for the conversion of souls, they had been equally afflicted. Such was the spirit that distinguished these primitive converts; and it seems proper here to pause, and hold up to your contemplation this delightful example of *the Christian's sympathy with the trials of God's ministering servants*. There cannot be imagined a more lovely feature of the believer's renewed character, than that affectionate interest with which he enters into the conflicts and labors of the appointed

* Rom. xv. 15. 16.

† Eph. iii. 8.

heralds of salvation : and particularly of him who, in the course of Providence, is his own spiritual guide to a world of immortality and glory. And yet, my brethren, if it is in this feeling that we perceive one of the necessary fruits of divine grace within the heart, how defective must we consider the religious condition of a vast proportion of those, who name the name of Christ, sit in our sanctuaries as God's people, and, in profession, are invested with the character, and influenced by the views of Christians ! It is not that there is any want among the majority of professed believers, of that kindly solicitude, which is ready to mourn with the Christian minister in his merely human sorrows. Of this active tenderness and friendship, there is as great an abundance now, as in the days of the suffering Apostle : but it is in respect of that higher and spiritual feeling, which follows the messenger of Christ through his path of daily discouragement—which sighs over his fruitless endeavors to win souls to Christ—and which, in view of these peculiar trials to which he is subjected, leads the Christian disciple to aid him with the secret and anxious co-operation of his wishes, and his prayers—it is by the absence of this species of sympathy among the assemblies of God's professing people, that he who preaches Jesus to a guilty world is made to feel that he is toiling in solitude ! “The minister who is placed over you in the Lord,” observes the eloquent and pious Mr. Jay,* “has his trials as a man ; and he has his trials as a Christian ; and in addition to both these, he has trials peculiar to his office. Could he have foreseen all at the beginning, he would have been disheartened at the entrance.

* Christian Contemplated. Lecture iv.

Never successful according to his wishes, and sometimes apparently useless, he is often ready to lay down his commission at his Master's feet; to say, 'I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain.' My brethren, are there not some of you, who think not of these things? who view the duties of the ministerial office, precisely as you regard those of any ordinary and worldly avocation? who never dream of the conflicts which we wage with the corrupt, and impenitent, and immovable heart? and are, in consequence, never led to offer up one petition on our behalf, to that Source of grace and strength which can alone give us the victory? But if so, you are wanting in one of the characteristic marks of Christ's real disciple. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves."

The inspired Apostle proceeds, in the next verse, merely to repeat, in another and stronger form, the assurance of his affection for these Christian brethren. He appeals to the great Searcher of hearts for the truth of his professions. "For God is my record," or rather, is my witness, "how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ." The term "bowels" here employed by St. Paul, to express his attachment to the Philippian believers, is one of frequent use in the Scriptures; and signifies strong and ardent love. Thus Zacharias, in that song of his which is recorded by St. Luke,† speaks of "the tender mercy of our God," which, literally rendered, would be, "the bowels of mercy of our God." When the Apostle, then, says that he was drawn towards these brethren in the Lord, "in the bowels of Jesus Christ," he

* II. Cor. xiii. 5.

† Luke, i. 78.

means thereby, that he entertained a feeling in regard to them similar to that affection which our divine Master exhibited, for a guilty and ruined world. The whole verse, accordingly, has been thus aptly rendered by an eminent critic,* "For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the tender affections of Jesus Christ." I need not dwell upon the declaration before us any longer than by remarking, in how interesting a manner it exemplifies a Christian's love for those, who are united in the bonds of a common faith. You observe the *universality* of the Apostle's expression of regard. He felt an attachment to each and all of them, without exception; and, however various they might be in rank, and intellectual character, and human attainments, looked upon them as one in the love and service of the Lord Jesus Christ. And such, my brethren, is the feeling of Christ's real disciples toward each other, in every age and clime. It is not to be expected, neither is it necessary, that the believer should feel equal emotions of friendship and regard, for all that love the Lord Jesus in sincerity. One servant of God is cultivated by education, and another is destitute of this superior refinement; one is favored by Providence with many intellectual gifts, another has none of these interesting endowments; and between these two persons it would be unreasonable to look for that extent of attachment, which can only be founded upon congeniality of mind, and the possession of equal advantages and blessings. Yet, notwithstanding, the Christian does experience, with respect to all his fellow-believers, a strong and peculiar species of affection. It is not so much a human, as a heavenly feeling: it is the tender love of brethren in Christ: it is the union

* Wakefield's New Testament.

of those who have been redeemed by the same precious blood ; who are gathered into the same fold ; who, at the table of a Saviour's commemorated death, "eat of the same spiritual meat, and drink of the same spiritual drink."* This yearning of the heart towards the possessors of like hopes, and of a common Master, is one of the indications of a divine renewal, by the power of the Holy Ghost. Let us all bear this truth in remembrance ; and diligently inquire whether, with St. John, we can exclaim, " We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."†

With this expression of love for his distant friends at Philippi, St. Paul joins a fervent prayer for their increase in all the graces and attainments of the life of God. This desire of his soul is contained in the three remaining verses of the portion under review ; and is in exact harmony with the spirit which he manifests, on other occasions than the present. He always exhibits the religion of Christ as a principle, which when implanted within the believer, should be continually carrying him onward to higher degrees of holiness. Thus, for the Christians of Colosse he prays, that they might be " fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God : "‡ and this petition is, in its form and manner, very similar to that to which your attention is now to be called. The words before us, in the supplication which they contain for the spiritual progress of the Philippians, present a description of some of the most important features that distinguish the Christian character. Let us follow the Apostle in his delineation, and compare our own attainments with the standard.

The *first* Christian grace which forms the subject of the in-

* I. Cor. x. 3. 4.

† I. John, iii. 14.

‡ Col. i. 10.

spired writer's prayer, is *love*.—"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more." St. Paul refers, in this place, to that evidence of the Christian's renewed condition, which consists in his fervent love to God: an affection which rejoices in the contemplation of the divine character; and which uniformly displays itself in the imitation of that character, by an ardent love to men. Such is the qualification, then, which the Apostle places first among the objects of his prayer, in behalf of these cherished friends; and the Holy Scriptures, in other places, speak of this divine affection as constituting the chief and prominent feature of the believer's character. St. Paul prays for the Ephesians, that they may be "rooted and grounded in love."* St. Jude gives this counsel; "Keep yourselves in the love of God."† And our inspired writer's desire for the Thessalonian Christians, is of the same character. "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God."‡ This heavenly principle, therefore, is set forth, as you perceive, in the word of life, as the grand mark of Christ's followers in the world. The believer, through the teachings of divine grace, is called into realizing views of the unspeakable goodness and mercy of God; he discerns the wondrous manifestations of his Father's character, in the course of providence, and in the gift of his dear Son; and the sight draws him from every other object to this gracious Being, as the "chief among ten thousand," and the "altogether lovely." The whole life, indeed, of the servant of God, may be defined to be a course of grateful contemplation of his Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer; and the necessary and invariable accompaniment of such a spirit, is an active benevolence to man. This is the love that

* Eph. iii. 17.

† Jude, 21.

‡ II. Thess. iii. 5.

distinguished the faithful at Philippi, and for the increase of which the Apostle, in the words before us, so fervently implores. It is the great attribute of the renewed man: "He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him."^{*}

But *secondly* ; the Apostle desires that this love to God might be *enlightened and discriminating in its character*.—"This I pray," says he, "that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment." The words here rendered "knowledge" and "judgment," are very nearly the same in signification ; and imply that sound and discerning mind, which turns the affections to their proper object. Such is the quality, by which St. Paul asks that these Philippians may be distinguished ; and, my brethren, if there be one feature that separates the real Christian's love for God, from the vague and indefinite feeling of so many professed believers, it is that clear perception here described by the Apostle. If you go to numbers of God's nominal servants around you, and inquire of them whether that blessed Being is the object of their affection, they will instantly reply in the affirmative. But what is the nature of this pretended attachment ? It is altogether blind, and confused, and imperfect. It is founded upon no experimental acquaintance with the character of God, and with his claims upon their devotion and gratitude. It sees nothing of his mercy, in the providential dealings of his hand ; it has never tasted the comforts of his redeeming love ; and, in consequence, amidst the firmest and most confident protestations of affection, the principle is utterly wanting. From this merely general feeling, let us turn to that of the renewed servant of God. This man, the subject of Christ's

^{*} I. John, iv. 16.

illuminating Spirit, knows in whom he has believed; and, because he thus knows him, loves him with a real affection—an attachment built upon solid grounds—a homage elicited by the inward and pervading consciousness of multiplied obligations. Such is the converted Christian's love to God; and the same discriminating character marks his love to man. His liberality abounds, but it is "in knowledge and in all judgment." He wisely selects the objects of his charity; he perceives in what cases to give, and in what to withhold; amidst all the promptings of his compassion, he keeps "sound wisdom and discretion."*

Let us pass on to a *third* characteristic mark of the Christian, as here set forth by the Apostle; *his decided preference of the unsearchable riches of the gospel, to the dross of an unsatisfying world.* "That ye may approve," or, choose, "things that are excellent," are the words in which he continues his prayer, for these primitive converts at Philippi.—Such are the superior objects on which the pilgrim to heaven fastens his heart; and let us, for an instant, follow him through one or two of the instances, in which he exemplifies this wise and elevated choice. The world offers him its pleasures: but he sees their leanness and their brevity; and, looking beyond this fleeting condition, lays hold upon that favor of God which is "life," and that loving-kindness which is "better than life." It tenders him its honors. He rejects the gift; he loves the praise of God, better than the praise of men; and, with true sublimity, aspires to that crown of life, which remains for those who "have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"† It holds out to him

* Prov. iii. 21.

† Rev. vii. 14.

the lure of its gains. Here, too, his enlightened vision leads him to despise an earthly, and to seek after a heavenly portion. An interest in the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, is the only treasure that he desires; to this, therefore, he cleaves, as to that which rust cannot corrupt, and which thieves cannot steal.—This, brethren, is the true Christian's choice: if any of you, therefore, amidst your professions of being the Lord's servants, are ensnared with the frivolities of the world, or carried away with its ambition, or influenced with the inordinate love of its riches, you are none of his. You do not in reality "approve things that are excellent;" you are earthly; you are of those whom the Apostle describes, "They that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh."*

In the next and *fourth* topic of his petition, St. Paul describes another conspicuous quality in the children of God: *their earnest desire and study that, by their example, the gospel of Christ be not blasphemed*.—"That ye may be sincere, or, in other words, free from stain and reproach, "and without offence till the day of Christ." The word rendered "without offence," refers to one who is careful not to be an occasion, through any faults or inconsistencies in his own conduct, of stumbling and ruin to others. The very same expression is used by the Apostle, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians; where he says, "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God."† There is perhaps nothing, my brethren, by which the real follower of Jesus is more distinctly marked, than by this tender, conscientious, trembling apprehension, lest he should prove an injury

* Rom. viii. 5.

† I. Cor. x. 32.

to the cause of that sacred Master, under whose banners he has once enlisted. He feels, as he travels on the pilgrimage of life, the deep sense of his station and responsibilities; and is too much concerned for the honor of divine grace, and the character of Christ's holy religion, not to be under an hourly dread of the very thought, that, through his instrumentality, this religion should be "wounded in the house of its friends." In conformity with this holy principle, he marches onward through this region of temptations: he remembers that he is observed: and, anxious to strengthen in the wicked, in the wavering, and in the believer, the conviction that the gospel is true, he turns neither to the right hand nor to the left; he comes out from the follies and dissipation of the world; and seeks to show himself as one who is crucified to life, and has set his affection on eternal realities. "This is his course; and it produces its measure of good results in regard to others. They confess that, in him, profession and conduct are in harmony; and if they are not won by the spectacle, *he*, at any rate, can exclaim, "I am pure from the blood of all men."

The Apostle concludes this summary of Christian attainments with the petition, that the Philippian converts may *abound in deeds of holiness*. "Being filled" says he, "with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God." In other words; He that is influenced by the grace of the Redeemer, will display that grace by every good and excellent work; be this, therefore, your humble aim; and, by fervent charity, and an active and practical benevolence, and a steady conformity to the image of your divine Master, evince the reality of your spiritual change. —St. Paul, then, in the language before us, clearly maintains

the position, that the real Christian is, in all instances, a pattern of love unfeigned, and of universal holiness of life: but the principal consideration to which I would lead your minds, is the origin to which these blessed fruits are here traced by the pen of inspiration. Mark the expressions of the Apostle. They are "by Jesus Christ;" or, in other words, they are the offspring of his sanctifying Spirit, and of that alone: and they are "unto the glory and praise of God:" that is, they all tend to shew the power of that almighty Agent, who has descended into the barren desert of the heart, and made it to blossom like the rose.—This important truth, therefore, let me, in conclusion, leave with the reflections of every professing Christian within this sanctuary to-day. Does *your* character, my brethren, correspond with the Apostle's impressive portrait, in the verses which have been this morning considered? Are you filled with love to God, and benevolence to men? Is this love founded upon the sure basis of a discriminating and sound knowledge? Do you deliberately prefer the narrow way that leadeth unto life, to the broad road of destruction? Are you diligent to maintain, in all your career, a regular and consistent example? Is the light of your works shining, with a steady lustre, before the eyes of men? Are these things so? If not, your profession is vain: but if such *be* the true representation of your doings, all is of God; he is the great, first Cause of your excellent doings; "by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

LECTURE III.

CHAPTER I. 12—18.

But I would ye should understand, brethren that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel ; So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places ; And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife ; and some also of good will. The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds : But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then ? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached ; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.

THE Apostle, in the verses now to be considered, passes to a fresh and highly interesting topic ; that of his present sufferings in the cause of the Redeemer's gospel. It is to be recollected, that St. Paul was now confined as a prisoner in Rome ; and when we call to mind the intimate connexion which had subsisted between the Philippians and himself, and the deep affection that people bore towards him as a minister, and as a friend, it appears altogether natural that he should wish to re-

lieve their anxieties, by some tidings in regard to his real situation. Having, therefore, conveyed to these beloved fellow-Christians his congratulations on their faith and love, and his prayers for their advancement in holiness, he turns to himself as the subject; and transmits to them the intimation, that, even amidst the bitterness of captivity, he was enabled, all things considered, to "rejoice in the Lord, and to joy in the God of his salvation."

To cheer the spirits of his absent and solicitous friends, St. Paul thus addresses them, in the first verse of the portion now under review. "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me," that is, my bonds for Christ's sake, "have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel;" by which he intends to say: I feel exceedingly anxious that your hearts should not be discouraged, nor "faint at my tribulations;"† for these calamities, having been all overruled for good, and made subservient to the advancement of your Master's cause, are only blessings in disguise.—From what we know, my brethren, by our own experience, of the short-sightedness and unbelief of the human mind, we may readily conceive of three distinct, and mournful impressions, which may have been produced upon these Philippian brethren by the circumstance of the Apostle's imprisonment. On the one hand, they would be disposed to regard this even as a subject for unmingled grief; and, when they thought of the situation of their revered teacher, to consider him only as a person, who had been visited with one of the severest of human trials, and as an object of sympathy and compassion.

* Hab. iii. 18.

† Eph. iii. 13.

This is the habit, in too great a degree, even of the enlightened servants of God. In the darker dispensations of Providence, they see nothing but misery ; and, instead of looking at all sides equally, and waiting in faith and patience for the final development, they can only mourn under chastisements. But, besides this feeling of deep sorrow at the Apostle's captivity, there would probably enter into the minds of some of the Philippians, as they thought of his sufferings, a momentary doubt as to the truth and blessedness of religion ; when they thus beheld one of its chief and most heroic defenders abandoned to imprisonment and shame. This, also, is one of the temptations of real believers. They see, as they cast their eyes around them, some of the Lord's people subjected to trials and privations, and the wicked "prospering in the world:"* and, without reflecting that their heavenly Father may have some merciful intent in these arrangements, are ready to conclude that all is a deception, and that there are no peculiar privileges for the Christian. Or further ; it may possibly have been imagined by these primitive believers, that, as their great and venerated friend was now restrained from farther exertions, the cause of the gospel would be materially retarded : for the human mind is ever losing sight of the Almighty's arm, and resting upon secondary causes ; and, because Providence removes one of his instruments out of the way, gives up all as ruined and lost.—In order to put an end to these various feelings of his brethren at Philippi, St. Paul informs them that his troubles had led to the happiest results ; and in what manner they had contributed to the success of the gospel, let us hear from his own description.

* Ps. lxxiii. 12.

And 1. The Apostle tells them that his imprisonment, dark and disastrous as the visitation seemed, had been the means of spreading the knowledge of Christ among those who were before ignorant of his religion.—“So that my bonds in Christ,” he observes, “are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places;” or, in other words, it is now become notorious, not only in the imperial residence, but generally throughout the capital, that I am a captive for the gospel of the Lord Jesus; and this has led many, who were previously unacquainted with the claims and character of the Saviour, to commence an active and personal examination. By turning to the conclusion of this Epistle, you will find the inspired writer making reference to the saints that were “of Cesar’s household;”^{*} from which it appears, that some of the emperor’s retinue had actually cast in their lot among the professing followers of Christ. These persons had, in all probability, been induced to begin their attention to the divine truths of religion, by the circumstance of St. Paul’s incarceration for the defence of them. The fact would awaken their curiosity; they would be excited to inquire and investigate; and would thus be gradually conducted from the darkness of unbelief and error, into an experimental acquaintance with the way of life. This, therefore, was one of the ways, in which the confinement of the Apostle tended to the promotion of that very cause, which, according to human calculations, it was destined to wither and destroy; and the instance now before us, my brethren, exemplifies most beautifully that divine wisdom and mercy, which out of the bitter can bring forth sweetness, and make the seeming evils of life conducive to real and perma-

^{*} Ch. iv. 22.

nent good. He upon whom the hopes of the church rested, was in chains. The servants of God mourned for himself as an individual, and for the blighted prospects of that religion which he defended. But their views were narrow: the Redeemer did all things well: men that had never heard of Christ, now owned him as their Lord and their God: and numbers were added to the church of "such as should be saved."*

A *second* mode in which the Apostle's trials had operated to the advantage of religion, he proceeds thus to state. "And many of the brethren in the Lord," that is, preachers of the gospel, "waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." The word rendered "waxing confident," is very expressive; and denotes that clear, satisfactory, and firm trust in the reality of religion, which these persons had acquired by the sight of St. Paul's behavior under his sufferings. The inspired writer intends, therefore, to say, that, so far from the gospel having been impeded in its course by his imprisonment, an exactly opposite result had taken place: for that the ministering servants of the Lord, beholding the submission, fortitude, and entire acquiescence in the divine will, with which he had been enabled to bear his afflictions, had therein perceived a new testimony to the power of the grace of God; and had gone forth with added energy to deliver the message of One, who thus supported his servants in the dark hour of their extremity.—Behold, then, in this spirit of holy daring with which those early preachers were inspired, another blessed fruit of the Apostle's trials. And, my brethren, you need not wonder that such an effect

* Acts, ii. 47.

was produced upon their minds, by the spectacle of his constancy and rejoicing ; for if there be one bright and incontrovertible evidence of the truth of that religion we profess, it is the manner in which it sustains its disciples, when all the consolations of this world have departed. Call to mind the impression that has, at different times, been wrought upon your own hearts, by the sight of believers rising in triumph above the bitterest of human trials. You have seen them plunged from affluence into poverty ; stripped of the objects of dearest affection ; visited with sickness ; subjected to mortifications and disappointment ; and yet, amidst all, preserving the same even tenor of contented cheerfulness : and what has been the conclusion you have drawn as you behold them ? You have felt as if an argument for the reality of faith was here presented, superior to all besides ; you have thought with delight, that in this case, at least, there could be no deception ; and have poured forth new ascriptions to that Spirit of grace, which could thus call forth songs of sweetest praise from the furnace of affliction. From your own experience, therefore, you may conceive of the frame of soul in which those ministers of Jesus went forth to their labors, from the scene of the Apostle's imprisonment ; and of the superior ardor, with which they would now preach to a guilty world the unsearchable riches of Christ. And it is in the fact of this quickened zeal of God's ambassadors in his service, that we are furnished with another proof of the unreasonableness of mourning under trials. His confinement was one of the choicest of blessings ; it warmed the spirit of every herald of the cross with new devotion ; and, through these more engaged and animated efforts,

fresh multitudes received Christ in their hearts, "the hope of glory."^{*}

Such were the two advantages, which, as the Apostle tells us, had resulted to the cause of Jesus, from the captivity he was then enduring. Before passing to the next part of his observations, it may be instructive to contemplate, for an instant, the delightful model he has here furnished, of the manner in which the Christian should look at all the adverse circumstances of his life. Consider the actual situation of St. Paul, when he penned the words that have just passed in review. He was a prisoner: and few calamities are more aggravating to the human spirit than bondage. And yet what is the view which you here find him taking, of this bitter and humbling visitation? It is simply that of a thankful recognition of God's merciful designs in the allotment: and, instead of turning with restless discontent to his own condition, he traces the blessings with which it was connected; joyfully discerns the kindness with which mercy had been mingled with judgment; and because, through his sufferings, the cross of Christ had been more widely proclaimed, and additional souls had been converted and saved, he is seen, according to his own touching language upon another occasion, "glorying in tribulations also."[†] Now, my dear hearers, this happy mode of surveying the dark providences of his pilgrimage, is rightly enough considered as one of the distinguishing privileges of the Christian: and yet who among you that examines his own experience, or the conduct of too many of the Saviour's disciples, can say that it is the believer's unvarying spirit amidst the trials of his course? Let me invite you, then, to come to

^{*} Col. i. 27.

[†] Rom. v. 3.

the verses before us for instruction ; and, sitting down with the Apostle in his prison, to follow out, through all the sorrows of existence, the finger of a wise and merciful Disposer. When the Almighty visits you with the rod of affliction, you find it hard to see a blessing in the dispensation. But the reason is, that you do not, like this primitive servant of God, make the endeavor to look for it : or you would with gratitude discover, that, in robbing you of some earthly comfort, the Lord was calling your affections heavenward ; that in making your path thorny and difficult, his design was to awaken the remembrance of your iniquities and sins ; that, in defeating some favorite plan, he was preventing "evil to come," and saving you from the mournful catastrophe of being ruined at your own request. But let us admit, that the believer cannot, in all cases, imagine any profitable end in his afflictions. Even so it may be : yet is it not possible, that the intention which is hidden now, may be fully disclosed at some future period ?

✓ When John Newton, about to let down the boat from the ship's side, and to proceed in it to his accustomed station on the African coast, was suddenly forbidden by his commander, he was disappointed : but that night the boat sunk, and he who had gone as his substitute perished in the waters of the river : and this eminent servant of God was constrained to acknowledge, that the Father of heaven may have merciful intentions in frustrating our desires, though, at the time, he conceals them from our vision,* Under such circumstances, therefore, my brethren, "in patience possess your souls : " what now you know not, believe that "you shall know hereafter : "† and by the cheer-

* Authentic Narrative. Letter x.

† John, xiii. 7.

fulness with which, in all scenes and situations, you see love and wisdom shining from above, exemplify that portrait of a Christian's blessedness, drawn by the pencil of Archbishop Leighton. "Thus solid," says he, "is the happiness of the saints, that in the lowest condition it remains the same: in disgraces, in caves, in prisons and chains, cast them where you will, still they are happy."*

Having thus described the good effect which had resulted from his imprisonment, in the increased zeal of his brethren in the ministry, the Apostle goes on to advert to a topic exceedingly painful in its nature. Among those who, in the primitive church, were engaged in the office of preachers, there were some who had become converts from the Jewish faith; and who, in their delivery of the gospel message, recommended, together with several of the doctrines of Christ, an observance of the abrogated institutions of the Mosaic dispensation. These persons were the source of multiplied griefs and anxieties to St. Paul, during the whole course of his ministerial labors; and their perpetual endeavor was to create a faction, among the members of the different churches, in opposition to his apostolic authority. With such malignant adversaries he was now annoyed at Rome: so that, while there were some heralds of salvation who were of the true Christian spirit, others, on the contrary, were converting the great duties of their office into instruments of intrigue, self-aggrandizement, and discord. Let us hear the Apostle's account of these teachers of the word. "Some indeed," he states, "preach Christ even of envy and strife;" or, in other words, their labors are stimulated merely by jealousy of my station and influence,

* Commentary on I. Peter; at Ch. iv. verse 14.

and in a spirit of wicked rivalry : and he proceeds to portray their character still further in the sixteenth verse, where he says ; “ The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds ; ” that is, their whole object is to produce an alienation of feeling from my person ; their motives are not pure and single ; they enjoy a secret pleasure in the thought, that, while I am lying in imprisonment, they will be able to gain the affections of the people wholly to themselves. These are the men whom he contrasts with others of God’s ministering servants, of a better and holier character ; and of whom he tells us, that their preaching was “ of good-will,” that is, out of a pure, unmixed desire for the everlasting salvation of men ; “ and of love knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel,” by which he means to say, that they were full of affection for the great work of converting sinners unto God ; and, as the Apostle was placed by divine Providence in the ministry, for the important purpose of establishing Christ’s truth against all the gainsayings of Jews and Gentiles, that they were anxious to assist him in this object, and to supply the present loss of his services by their own increased diligence in the cause.

From the description of the Apostle, as thus briefly illustrated, it appears that those factious leaders of whom he complains did correctly exhibit the truth as it is in Jesus : it seems probable, therefore, that, perceiving the success of the gospel as proclaimed in all its purity by St. Paul, and in order still more effectually to procure the hearts of men in their favor, they concealed their own peculiar creed, and unfolded the cross of a dying Saviour as the single medium of acceptance. These persons, then, my brethren, acted the depraved and monstrous

deception, of proclaiming the gospel of the Son of God, while they themselves were hypocrites in heart; and let us, from the representation here given, draw for our instruction the important doctrine which it teaches. The inference to which I would lead your minds, is that of *the superior honor which God puts upon his own preached word, by making it successful to the conversion of sinners, notwithstanding the sins and unworthiness of its messengers*. How was it with these primitive ambassadors of the Lord Jesus? They were slaves of rancorous animosity against the most distinguished of apostles: and yet, because they held up Christ, in all his fulness, to a dying and condemned world, they were the means of increasing the numbers of the Redeemer's flock in the very centre of heathen idolatry. And so it has ever been found, from that early period to the present. Men have intruded themselves into the sacred office, who have been destitute even of outward morality of life: and yet Christ's gospel, delivered from their mouths in its native simplicity and excellence, has been made, through God's Spirit, to uncounted thousands, "the power of God unto salvation."* But let us pass from these wolves in the clothing of sheep, to persons of a far better and more elevated character. There are, as you are well aware, those among the preachers of the truth of Jesus, who, together with this truth, deliver much that is dictated by party feeling, and by an intolerant spirit against all from whom they differ. One, for example, owing either to a temper naturally strong, or to the contracting and hardening influences of his early education, deals forth with violence the peculiarities of the system of Calvin; and, in his anxiety to

* Rom. i. 16.

prove others to be in the wrong, sometimes entirely loses recollection of that charity which is the bond of peace, and of all virtues. Another is seen insisting, with equal asperity, upon the correctness of the scheme of Arminius; and cannot be content without levelling, whenever he ascends the pulpit, some shaft of invective against his opposers. And this same contentious and selfish disposition may be seen displaying itself, here and there, through all the various churches of Christendom: manifested, in one place, by a bigoted zeal for some favorite doctrine; in another, by angry defence of a particular ecclesiastical constitution; in a third, by disputatious eagerness in support of some little point of discipline. Now, my brethren, provided that these heralds of the Lord Jesus, in the midst of all their hostility and warmth of feeling, still continue to exhibit Christ to their hearers, as the only refuge of lost sinners, what is the result of their efforts? Is there not a concomitant blessing? Are not the careless arrested, the profane convinced of their danger, and new subjects gained to that kingdom of God, which is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost?"* Herein, then, discern the brightest of testimonies to the power of that gospel, which, notwithstanding all the sin, and all the corrupt admixtures of men, is thus signally distinguished and glorified. Let us see in the circumstance an incontestible evidence of its divinity; and admire with adoration and rapture, that doctrine of Christ Crucified, which "is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."†

* Rom. xiv. 17.

† Heb. iv. 12.

But in the concluding verse of the present portion, we have the warrant of the Apostle, not only for acknowledging, in the success of the gospel by whomsoever preached, a testimony to its living efficacy, but for delighting in this glorious result. Listen to his exclamation. "What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice;" that is: What is the difference in the result? God can overrule the infirmities, and even the foulest hypocrisy of his ministers, to the conversion of sinful men; and in the knowledge of this consolatory truth, I can overlook the imperfections of the instrument, and thrill with transport at the victories which he obtains.—Permit me, therefore, in drawing the present Lecture to a close, to deduce, from these last words of St. Paul, two characteristic qualities of the real believer. See, on the one hand, the pleasure with which he witnesses the triumphs of the gospel, and the extension of the benign and holy kingdom of the Prince of peace. The Apostle exults simply in this, that the knowledge of Christ was becoming daily more diffused, among the regions of spiritual wickedness; and it is this subject, that fills the breasts of all the servants of God with their highest and purest joy. "Thy kingdom come!" is the Christian's supplication; and, when he sees the petition answered, and souls converted, and saints advancing in holiness, he is enkindled into a feeling similar to that to which angels in glory are awakened, at the spectacle of "one sinner that repenteth." But further; the language of the Apostle before us displays the manner in which the believer, truly such, sacrifices to this anxiety for the salvation of men, all private feelings and considerations. Who were they, by whom the religion of Jesus

was thus widely promoted in the Roman capital? They were the determined and personal enemies of this imprisoned servant of Christ; and yet, under the very stings of their obloquy, and with the full conviction of their insincerity of soul, he is gladdened at the fruits of their labors. Adopt this spirit, my brethren, in reference to those who, in our day, preach to a ruined world the glad tidings of peace. Among the heralds of mercy, there may perchance be some, whose manner, whose style, whose attainments, are not precisely after the standard of excellence which you have adopted. Yet what of this? The only inquiry is, Does God honor and bless their ministrations? Are they made instruments of good? Through them, is the reign of the Lord Jesus promoted in our world? If so, away with prejudices, and with criticism, and with all earthly views; and with the heavenly-minded Apostle exclaim, "Every way, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice."

LECTURE IV.

CHAPTER I. 19—24.

For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ: which is far better: Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.

THE Apostle is here found proceeding in that same enviable spirit, in which we left him at the conclusion of the last Lecture: that of converting the very afflictions of life into themes of gratitude; and, instead of repining at these visitations of Providence, endeavoring rather to dwell upon the manner in which he renders them all subservient to his purposes of grace and mercy. We have seen him filled with gladness at the dissemination of the gospel, even through the instrumentality of those, who, while they preached Christ, were persecuting

the Apostle with slanderous insinuations ; and in like manner, on the present occasion, he continues to look at the bright side of that allotment of heaven, by which he was called to suffer reproaches, intriguing combinations, and opposition of the most malignant character, from professed heralds of God's message unto men. In what way he thus draws still farther consolation from his trials, let us now proceed to examine.

The inspired writer begins with expressing his firm conviction, that the malice of his opposers, so far from being injurious to him, would, through divine grace, lead to his increased faithfulness and courage in the service of his adorable Master, and to an everlasting recompense in the world to come. This declaration is contained in the nineteenth and twentieth verses, which are very closely connected with each other. "For I know," says he, "that this," that is, the animosity and contentious spirit of those leaders of a faction, of whom he had been speaking, "shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ ;" or, in other words, I feel a confident persuasion, by dependence upon the promises of God, that the Holy Ghost shall so lend me his influences, in answer to your fervent petitions on my behalf, as to make me unyielding in the maintenance of the truth as it is in Jesus, and thus conduct me to an eternal crown of rejoicing. This is the general observation which he makes ; and he goes on to express it more fully in another form. "According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing," or, in no respect, "I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness," that is, unshrinking freedom of speech, "as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body," or, in my person, "whether it be by life, or by death." The term rendered

"earnest expectation," occurs twice only in the New Testament; and signifies properly the intense eagerness of a person, who bends forward his head to look for some approaching object. Thus, in his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul declares, that "the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God."* According to this meaning of the word, the whole declaration comprised within the two verses before us, may be thus stated:—that the malicious invectives of his adversaries gave him no uneasiness nor pain: for that, on the assurance that there was a Hearer of prayer, he rested satisfied, that he should be the gainer rather than the loser; that, in conformity with his own longing desires, he should be enabled, in answer to the petitions of his Christian brethren, to adhere firmly to the profession which he had begun; and, whether it should please divine Providence to prolong his days, or to consign him to a speedy martyrdom, should open his mouth, with his accustomed boldness, in defence of the glorious cause to which his life was consecrated.

Having thus exhibited the general scope of the inspired writer, in the passage under review, I may profitably call your attention to one of two important truths which it contains.

You are here pointed, on the one hand, to a most efficient means established by Providence, for the preservation of Christians in a faithful and resolute career; *the supplications of their brethren in the Lord*. The Apostle, as you perceive, describes the succors of the Redeemer's grace as being vouchsafed in return for the entreaties of the Philippians; and it is in the same way, that, in other parts of his writings, he sets forth the petitions of believers as one of the appointed

* Rom. viii. 19.

channels, through which heavenly gifts descend to the companions of their pilgrimage. In his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, he thus addresses them; "Ye also helping together by prayer for us :"^{*} and he, in like manner, counsels the Ephesians; "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel."[†] In the statement, therefore, here made, discern, my Christian hearers, the obligation that rests upon all the servants of God, to lift up their voices in behalf of those who are members of the same body, and heirs of the same precious promises. Remember them in the exercises of the closet, and in the offerings of your family devotion; ask that the feeble may be strengthened, the wavering supported, the partially enlightened led on to clearer apprehensions of truth; and, in this way, fulfil your part in that spiritual commonwealth, in reference to which the affectionate Apostle exclaims, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?"[‡]

But while the language before us thus exhibits the prayers of disciples as one of the sources, from which grace and holiness are derived to their fellow-travellers to eternity, it also, on the other hand, delineates *the confidence of every real Christian, in regard to the success of these fervent supplications for his perseverance in the faith.* Observe the situation of the imprisoned Apostle. He is traduced by adversaries: his life is brought into peril from their machinations: but, on the strength of those repeated declarations of the word of life, that they who approach the mercy-seat in sincerity and

^{*} II. Cor. i. 11.

[†] Eph. vi. 18. 19.

[‡] II. Cor. xi. 29.

in truth shall not go unrewarded away, he lifts up his head with joy ; and feels inly persuaded, that, from the united requests of these grateful Philippians, he shall obtain all the courage, faith, and devotedness, which are necessary to his everlasting safety in the end. My brethren, the confidence of this primitive servant of Christ in the promises of his Lord, is the spirit of every renewed and sanctified heart ; and, accordingly, while the degrees of your persuasion as to the fact, that God answers the petitions of Christians for each other, may occasionally vary, yet the principle, if you are a spiritual disciple, will ever reign within your heart, and animate you on the journey of life. The believer, trembling under the power of temptation, prays for himself : but he also remembers, that others are engaged in the same earnest work of supplication in his behalf ; and, on the strength of the Almighty's own declaration, he rejoices to know, that " the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."*

After having thus expressed his persuasion, that all the dispensations of Providence would result in his eternal safety, St. Paul, in the next verse, repeats, in another and exceedingly impressive form, the same strong conviction of his mind. " For to me to live," he exclaims, " is Christ ;" that is, the whole object and end which I propose to myself, during my course below, is to serve and glorify the Lord Jesus : " and to die is gain ;" or, in other words, death will, as I humbly trust, carry me to a state of happiness and rest, far better than all that the present existence can possibly afford. He intends, therefore, in these words, to convey the idea, that he rejoiced in the well-grounded assurance, that all with him was safe ;

* James, v. 16.

that, in examining his heart, and disposition, he found the honor of his divine Master to be the single mark before his eye ; and that, by necessary consequence, should he be called to depart from this scene of conflict, and to enter into the unseen world, it would only be to receive a crown of life from the hands of the great Captain of his salvation.—And now, my beloved brethren, behold in this short sentence of the Apostle of the Gentiles, the character, experience, and true blessedness, of all the real children of God. There is a sublimity in the words before us, which turns into contempt the aims, the hopes, and the pretended happiness, of the followers of this vain world ; and it may, perhaps lead some unawakened heart within the present assembly to solemn reflection, to hold up the declaration of St. Paul, in contrast with the course and feelings of those who are afar from God. The Christian redeemed by the cross of his Lord and Master from death and hell, feels himself under a binding obligation to love and glorify that Saviour, in the body and soul which he has ransomed : he passes his days in a continual frame of gratitude : and by his exclusive affection, his renunciation of the world, and his endeavors to advance, according to his ability, the cause and kingdom of the Redeemer, exemplifies precisely that noble and heavenly mind, which is determined to know nothing among men, “ save Jesus Christ and him crucified.”* Turn from this man to the worldling. He comes into life : he grows up to years of observation : he sees the Son of God, for the everlasting salvation of ruined man, taking upon him human infirmities, becoming acquainted with griefs, and, at

* I. Cor. ii. 2.

length, bowing his anointed head beneath a death of agony and shame : and, after beholding the spectacle, goes onward through life without remembrance of that tender sacrifice—given up to self as the grand object of devotion—absorbed in the gains, striving after the aggrandizement, or occupied with the petty pleasures of a state, to which he has consecrated every faculty of his being. Survey these two characters : and then say which of them has most of loveliness and of grandeur. But if the Christian rises thus superior in the objects of his pursuit, compare him with the man of this life in that other point of view, in which he is presented in the language of the Apostle. The believer, in this humble and consistent path of obedience, faith, and love, knows that he is the subject of Christ's gracious promises : in this persuasion, therefore, he can look forward to dissolution as the commencement of a higher felicity : and can feel that, whensoever it may come, it will only be to him the gate of heaven, and an entrance into the eternal joy of his Lord. How is it, in this respect with the unchanged and earthly minds of the great mass of men ? As infinite as is the advantage to which the Christian believer looks forward with joy, is the loss which *they* contemplate, in the arrival of this concluding period. Death is to them only the messenger of condemnation, and terminated delights, and black despair ; it is a separation from all the sources of their rejoicing ; and it is, accordingly, a prospect which they suffer, as seldom as possible, to disturb with its clouds and shadows their dream of vanity and sin. The Apostle, therefore, in this brief declaration, sets forth the grand and signal distinction between the friends of God and of the world :

and if such be, in all cases, the Christian's character and views, may not the model be presented with propriety to those before me, who are the professed servants of the Lord? Bring your own individual persons to this standard of conduct and of experience. Are you, my brethren, making the love of Christ the ruling principle of your lives? Do you feel yourselves thus supremely attached to the Master, who bore your sins in his own body on the tree? Can you take the Apostle's language upon your lips, and with humble confidence say, that, in scorn of the follies and temptations of a present world, you are making the service of the Lord Jesus the ever-foremost object of your heart's desires? Are you able at this very moment humbly to declare, that to depart out of life would be an exchange of partial, for perfect and unchangeable blessedness; and, in the prospect even of a speedy removal, to rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory? Now it is very possible, that with these views in regard to life and death, some of you feel no sympathy. If so, then, you have cause for reflection and for alarm; and may properly offer up the imploring petition, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts!"*

From this calm and complacent prospect of death, St. Paul passes, in the three succeeding verses, to a description of the various and conflicting desires by which he was agitated, as he contemplated the happiness of heaven on the one hand, and the field of usefulness opened to him in this world, on the other. The manner in which the holy Apostle has expressed these contending inclinations of his heart, is singularly beautiful and affecting. He first of all turns his thoughts to the

* Ps. cxxxix. 23.

privilege of continuing longer on earth, if the conversion of souls, and the glory of God, might thereby be effectually promoted. "But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor;" or, in other words, to extend the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, is a recompense that more than counterbalances all the trials of my warfare; and sweetens the bitterest cup of sorrow which the perverseness, the impenitence, or the malignity of men, can give the minister of salvation to drink. But here again, the world of glory rises to his vision; and, as he thinks of its immovable peace and rest, he wavers in his determinations. "Yet what I shall choose I wot not;" that is, I cannot positively decide either for this present state, or for a speedy departure out of the body. "For I am in a strait," he declares, "betwixt two," or, in other words, I am constantly distracted by two equally engaging objects; "having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better." The expression "to depart," is, in the original, peculiarly expressive and touching. It refers properly to that act by which a vessel is unloosed from her moorings, and sails for some distant clime; and thus represents most aptly that separation from the body, by which the Christian's spirit becomes at once disentangled from the burden of the flesh, and takes her immediate flight to the shores of a better country. The enjoyment procured by such a change, he declares to consist in "being with Christ;" by which he understands that species of enjoyment of the Lord's presence, which is granted to separate spirits; and the expressions here used are similar to that declaration in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, that he is "willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be

present with the Lord.”* This translation to the happiness of God’s redeemed people, St. Paul states to be “far better” than any thing here. These words but inadequately convey the force of his language. Literally rendered it would be, “far more better;” and the sacred penman hereby declares his inability to find terms sufficiently glowing, for the purpose of expressing the unmeasured felicity of that world of light. It is thus that, at the view of what God has prepared for those who love him, the holy Apostle longs to be released: but again, turning his eyes to the pressing exigencies of the church of Christ, and filled with desires to promote his Master’s glory in the work of the ministry, he leans to the opposite side of this perplexing question, and exclaims, “Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.”—Having thus illustrated the phraseology of the sacred writer, let me invite your attention to a brief statement of *three* truths which his words unfold, deserving of careful recollection.

And 1. The example of St. Paul, as here exhibited, *sets forth the prominent reason, for which a longer continuance in the present life appears desirable to the Christian.* Turn once more to the words before us. “If I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor:” “to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.” You perceive, then, my brethren, that the single consideration which weighed in the mind of the Apostle, as making this existence worthy of a wish, was the service and glory of his divine Master. And such, to a certain extent, is the experience of all the spiritual servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is, indeed, undeniable, that there are some inducements of an earthly kind which have their share

* II. Cor. v. 8.

of influence upon the believer ; and which, when subordinate, are not contrary to the will of his heavenly Father. Life is pleasant to the man of affection : when he looks round upon the family, the connexions, the friends, in whose lovely and cheering circle he is passing his days. This world is desirable to the scholar ; when he casts an eye upon the fields of useful knowledge yet unexplored, and upon pleasures of investigation that are to come : for even the great and holy Baxter, whose aspirations after the more immediate presence of God have never been exceeded by any uninspired mortal, speaks with an expression of sadness at the thought of parting from his “pleasant studies,” when the summons of death should arrive.* And further, this life is desirable to the man, to whom Providence has committed those who are dependent upon his care ; and for whom he wishes, before he goes hence forever, to procure the means of temporal comfort.—Still, however, the paramount consideration with the disciple of Christ, in wishing to be spared in these regions below, is one immeasurably higher than all that have been mentioned. It is his meat and his drink to do the will of his heavenly Father : he regards this object as the grand privilege of his being : and if, by being allowed some farther periods, he can serve his Master more exclusively, shew forth the power of his grace, and be made an instrument of the least good to men, for this, especially, he longs to stay ; and, with the readiness of the Apostle, cries, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”†

2. The words of the Apostle exhibit the truth, that *the believer may very properly, in obedience to the divine will, desire to depart from these scenes of labor to his eternal*

* See his Dying Thoughts.

† Acts, ix. 6.

rest.—There is, indeed, a species of anxiety to quit a world in which Providence has placed us, which is not that of the purified and heavenly mind, but of a spirit in rebellion against the appointments of God. The Christian is perhaps weary with the temptations and difficulties of his career; or sickened, by a long course of afflictive dispensations, with every thing in life; or burdened with age and infirmities; and for this reason, though God may require his longer residence here, is agitated with a restless and feverish solicitude to finish his journey. Such, however, is not the spirit, disclosed in the beautiful language of the Apostle. He turns his vision to that blessed residence of the Redeemer's people; and, if so be that the service of Christ's church, and a longer course of active exertion, be not the will of the Lord Jesus concerning him, he aspires with devout and holy earnestness after the eternal fruition of the world of glory. And this wish, it is permitted, in like manner, to us to feel. A desire, thus chastened and submissive, to be called to the rest of heaven, has distinguished some of the most eminent of the servants of God, in all ages of his church. It was the spirit of Abraham, when, from a land of strangers, "he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."* It was the wish of the Psalmist, when, struggling amidst sins, and conflicting with spiritual wickedness, he cried with the rapture of joyful anticipation, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."†

Finally; Is it not in terms most tender and inviting, that the Apostle here *delineates the surpassing blessedness of*

* Heb. xi. 10.

† Ps. xvii. 15.

that world of joy? Recur, my brethren, to his language. "Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." Yes; it *is* "better" to leave this region where God has placed us for a season, for that invisible land which is in reversion. It is better, because there the Christian will have finished his conflict with sin; and, laying down the weapons of warfare, shall enter into eternal tranquillity. It is better, because there the mysteries of God's providence will be unravelled; and all the dealings of his hand, during this brief journey of life, will appear in the light of infinite justice, and infinite love. It is better, because the believer will then enter into a congenial society, without any mixture of those evil ones who here harass his progress; and in respect to whom David so feelingly exclaimed, "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!"* It is better, because there Christ himself sits, as the immediate joy of his people; and they can taste, without any diminution or hindrance, and through eternal years, the sweetness of his beatific presence.—My dear hearers, such was the view taken by St. Paul, of that place prepared for those who die in the Lord. Are these your feelings? Is it in such a light, that the world of spirits appears to your contemplations? Or, amidst the frivolities, the cares, the diversified objects of a present state, are the glories of that which is to come hidden from your vision? If so, however, you are destitute of the views and privileges of the believer. You must, through divine grace, become moulded into the frame of the Apostle: heaven must appear infinitely desirable above the insignificance and

* Ps. cxx. 5.

unsatisfactoriness of earth : you must sympathize with David's feelings, " My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God : when shall I come and appear before God ?"*

* Ps. xlii. 2.

LECTURE V.

CHAPTER I. 25—30.

And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again. Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

THE words now read stand in close connexion with those by which they are preceded. We left the Apostle, at the close of the former Lecture, in uncertainty which of two blessings to prefer, should divine Providence give him the liberty of choice; to depart immediately out of this world to "a better country," or to remain in the active service of the church on earth. In considering, however, the destitution under which Christians were then laboring, of devoted and affectionate mi-

nisters, he thought he perceived an indication that God intended to prolong his days : and this idea he proceeds, in the portion now to occupy your meditations, to state to the Philippians ; accompanied by some important admonitions in reference to their deportment as the servants of Christ. The verses before us bring you to the conclusion of the first of those four chapters, into which this apostolic letter has been divided.

Being firmly convinced, by observation of the existing state of things, that his longer continuance in life would materially subserve the Christian cause ; or, to use his own words to the Philippians in the twenty-fourth verse, that " to abide in the flesh was more needful for them ;" the Apostle declares that he felt assured, by this circumstance, of his being destined to farther exertions in the world. " And having this confidence," that is, being persuaded that the interests of the gospel would be promoted by my stay upon the earth, " I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith ; that your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again." It has been supposed, from the degree of certainty with which he predicts, in this place, his longer residence in the world, that he had received a direct revelation to that effect from the Almighty himself. That such intimations of the divine will were sometimes given, is proved by several examples. Thus it is related of St. Paul, in the Acts of the Apostles, that on a certain night " the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul : for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome."* During the voyage to

* Acts, xxiii. 11.

Rome, also, he is said to have encouraged his terrified companions by the assurance, "There stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar; and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee."* And St. Peter describes himself as having received, from the Redeemer himself, an express intimation of his speedy departure: "Knowing," says he, "that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me."† From some previous expressions, however, used by the Apostle, indicative of considerable doubt in regard to the designs of Providence concerning him,‡ it seems hardly probable that a revelation, like that of which I have spoken, was vouchsafed to him on the present occasion. His persuasions as to longer life appear to have amounted to nothing more than a reasonable expectation, arising from the plenteousness of the harvest, and the scarcity of laborers for the field: such a condition of the church seeming to him to forbid the supposition, that he was speedily to be removed from that scene of usefulness in which he had so long been acting. Under the influence of this conviction, he encourages his Philippian friends to hope, that he shall be spared to them, and to the rest of the Christian world, "for their furtherance and joy of faith." These words might otherwise be rendered, "for your advancement and joy in the faith;" and St. Paul means to say, that the continuance of his ministrations among them would tend to promote their growth in love to Christ, and to produce an increase of spiritual comfort. Another consequence resulting

* Acts, xxvii. 23. 24.

† II. Pet. i. 14.

‡ See verse 20.

from his deliverance, and from the temporary renewal of his residence at Philippi, would be, as he states, their "more abundant rejoicing" on his account, through the mercy of "Jesus Christ:" or, in other words, their hearts would be gladdened by the presence of him, who, under God, had been the means of their conversion to the gospel of the Redeemer, and their participation in its precious enjoyments, and glorious hopes.

Of these two advantages ascribed by the Apostle to his services, there is one, in particular, which may with profit be brought before your view; because it belongs to the office of the ministry in all ages of the world. He speaks, you perceive, *of that improvement and consolation which would flow to his Christian brethren, from his labors among them as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ.* And it is in this same light, my brethren, of an institution established by Providence for his spiritual edification and comfort, that the disciple of Christ should constantly regard the public preaching of the word of life. It is in numberless instances the fact, that, among those to whom the ministering servant of God delivers his message, there are some who, as to intellectual powers, variety and depth of attainments, or even experimental acquaintance with the inward life of a believer, are far superior to himself. He can, perhaps, with all his labors, bring out of his treasury nothing that to them will be new: they have previously travelled over the whole field through which he is leading them; and might themselves answer to the description given by Jesus Christ, of scribes "instructed

unto the kingdom of heaven.”* And yet these very persons, when they call to mind the origin of a standing ministry in the church, and the benefits consequently connected with it, will, as Christians, perceive that it is an ordinance, the necessity of which no extent of learning and of talent, and no personal advances in holiness, can possibly supersede. While this consideration gives confidence to the heralds of Christ, in proclaiming their Master’s gospel to all descriptions of men, it must, when duly pondered, lead the most privileged of the servants of God to a humble and teachable spirit, while sitting under the regular ministrations of the sanctuary. It will make them to feel, that there are none among the Saviour’s disciples too high to be learners : it will teach them, that the Lord has affixed a blessing to the preacher’s office, whoever be the individual that fills it : and will carry them to the house of God with the conviction, that what is there delivered has power, through the grace which accompanies it, to strengthen the pilgrim on his journey ; to support him amidst the temptations and the sorrows of life ; and to make him rich in the unspeakable joys of the children of God. Such are those views of the ministerial office, which St. Paul here sets forth ; and his words are in harmony with the language which he uses to the Ephesian believers. “He gave some, apostles ; and some, prophets ; and some, evangelists ; and some, pastors and teachers ; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”†

After this expression of his confident expectations, that the Lord designed to continue his days, the Apostle passes on to

* Matt. xiii. 52.

† Eph. iv. 11. 12.

the delivery of some useful precepts, for the observance of his Philippian friends. He commences with an exhortation of a general character : " Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ." The words, in their proper signification, denote a course of conduct answerable to the dignity and privileges of a citizen ; and are, therefore, very appropriately addressed to those, who, through faith in the Son of God, have been received as the happy subjects of his spiritual kingdom. To what particular Christian graces he refers, when he conveys this useful admonition, he then proceeds to inform us ; enumerating several distinct virtues, and urging them affectionately and earnestly upon their remembrance.

The *first* duty to which he calls their attention, is that of *Christian unity and agreement among themselves*.—" That whether I come and see you," he says, " or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit." The admonition here given is expressed with great beauty, and with somewhat more fulness, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians : " Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you ; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment."* The intention of St. Paul is to enforce the propriety, and the expediency, of abstaining from controversy upon minor points of difference ; and of endeavoring rather, as they were possessors of " one Lord, one faith, one baptism," to " keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." And would to God, my dear brethren, that the

* I. Cor. i. 10.

counsel of the Apostle could be engraven upon the hearts of all, who, under the standard of Christ, profess to be "fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God!"* It would be difficult to suggest a more effectual method of lending weapons to the adversaries of the gospel, than that spirit of contention for lesser things, by which Christians, instead of presenting the appearance of one unbroken body, seem to be a "house divided against itself." The argument of the unbeliever, and of the worldling, is—Amidst such diversity of opinions, who shall venture to decide? Against this objection, then, the precept of St. Paul, in the words before us, furnishes believers with a complete and triumphant defence. Let those who are embraced within the pale of the same communion, merge unimportant differences in one common and absorbing attachment to the grand essentials of religion. Let those, who, under varying names, and with dissimilar modes of discipline and worship, are yet washed in the same blood, and travelling to the same heavenly country, evince, by their disposition to forget the points on which they differ, and to rejoice mutually in those on which they agree, that they are in reality one fold, under one Shepherd. In proportion to the extent with which this holy unanimity prevails among the servants of God, will the cavils of gainsayers be silenced: for though it is not to be expected, that, in the present state of things, all men should think alike, yet it is reasonably to be looked for, that, in the bonds of the Lord Jesus, his disciples should be drawn together into one feeling, with respect to the leading doctrines of the "glorious gospel of Christ."† Inquire only, where the Redeemer is acknowledged as the sinner's Saviour and God, and

* Eph. ii. 19.

† II. Cor. iv. 4.

the holiness of his requirements is maintained. Thither let your affections be called forth, and there enjoy sweet fellowship : and thus realize the Redeemer's prayer, and the Psalmist's expressive description. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"* "Neither pray I for these alone; but for them also which shall believe on me through their word. That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us."†

The *second* duty enjoined by the Apostle upon these Christians of Philippi, is that of *being actively and unitedly vigorous in defence of Christ's religion, against all the attacks of its enemies*.—"With one mind," says St. Paul, "striving together for the faith of the gospel." The word rendered "striving together," refers to the violent struggles of the wrestler; and the precept, taken in connexion with that which has just been considered, has certainly a peculiar force and propriety. The Philippians had been cautioned, immediately before, against dissensions among each other; and they are now admonished, that, if contention is in any case a virtue, it is when the servants of God are leagued, in heart and hand, against the opposers of the truth as it is in Jesus. It is in warfare with these, that the activity of the believer may be best employed; and the advice of the Apostle is admirably illustrated by the similar exhortation of St. Jude, "earnestly to contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."‡ These primitive converts to whom St. Paul was writing, were surrounded by adversaries mighty in number, and incessantly strenuous in their exertions. On the one

* Ps. cxxxiii. 1. † John, xvii. 20. 21. ‡ Jude, v. 3.

hand, were erroneous perverters of the truth ; whose aim was to revive, in the esteem of Christians, the abrogated institutions of Moses, and to adulterate the simple doctrine of faith. On the other, were the deriding philosophers, and the persecuting officers of imperial Rome ; all assailing, with untiring pertinacity, the foundations of the church of Christ. The Apostle means to say, therefore, that it was hardly expedient to be wasting their energies by internal feuds, while the common enemy was at the gates ; and he urges them to direct their collected strength against those, from whom danger was most to be apprehended. And, my brethren, may we not consider the language before us as being addressed, with equal plainness, to us of the present generation ? The situation of Christians in the present world, is, as it ever has been, that of a few followers of a heavenly Master, in the midst of uncounted myriads of beings lying in the darkness of spiritual ignorance, and at enmity with the Father of lights, and with the gospel of his adorable Son. Now, of these who are living in estrangement from the Author of their happiness, one very considerable portion is engaged in malignant opposition against Christ ; and seeking to eradicate from the affections of men that religion of Jesus, which is the only source of present comfort, and of everlasting salvation. What, then, in such a condition of things, is the obvious duty of the servants of God ? Is it to be anxious about subordinate distinctions ? Is it to be vigorous for things merely external ? Or is it not, rather, to provoke one another to holy emulation in the cause of their crucified Lord ; to labor, each according to his ability, in the spread of pure and undefiled religion, and in the dissemination of the volume of life ; and, by example, by precept,

by personal effort, to resist the progress of spiritual wickedness, and break down the strong holds of Satan and of sin? Such, beyond a question, is the obligation that rests upon the children of the Lord: and when, to the hosts of infidelity, are added the corruptions of false doctrine, and the inconsistent lives of worldly and merely nominal Christians, the believer will find that he has sufficient adversaries with whom to contend, without occupying himself with minor disputations. Let us all bear this truth in mind: and endeavor, as far as in us lies, to recognise but two grand classes of mankind; **THE FRIENDS, and THE ENEMIES OF GOD.**

The *next* admonition given by the Apostle, relates to *the conduct to be pursued under the dismaying assaults of persecution.*—"And in nothing terrified by your adversaries:" that is, maintaining your stand for Christ, firmly and without fear; and this exhortation he proceeds to strengthen, by one consideration of a very encouraging character. "Which is to them," he says, "an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God." The meaning of these words is simply this; that the believers of Philippi had no occasion to be in the least daunted, by the menaces or the reproaches of their enemies: for that this opposition, on their part, to every thing valuable in the gospel of Christ, was only a proof, or indication, of that final condemnation which awaited them; and of the glorious recompense that should one day be awarded, to the faithful servants of Jesus.—Now, my brethren, if there be any portions of the word of God which are applicable to Christians in every age, it is those that relate to the trials of the servants of God from the adversaries of the cross. These "cruel mockings" have been the portion of the

spiritually-minded, ever since the first establishment of the Redeemer's church; and hence the Apostle's declaration to Timothy, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."* The mere outward profession of the gospel, combined with a life of worldly conformity, and of temporizing concession to the customs of the frivolous and the gay, will, it is true, provoke little opposition or censure. But let the servant of God, confessing himself a ruined sinner, and flying to the cross of Jesus for salvation, give himself up, with his whole heart and life, to the self-denying service of his Lord and Master, and what is the consequence? The men of the present life look with no friendly eye, upon this decided course of action; they heap ridicule and odium upon it; and, by every mode of satirical invective, seek to shake the disciple from his ground. It is by no means improbable that there are some within the present assembly, who, having come out unequivocally and thoroughly for Christ Jesus, are called to bear this scourge of derision from those among whom they mingle in social intercourse. To such, then, let me present the language of the Apostle, in all its comforting power. It counsels you not to be depressed in the struggle. It carries you from the present transitory scene, to the final consummation of all things. It bids you there see the blackness and darkness that shall end the career of these deluded beings, and the eternal felicity of those who have confessed Christ before men.—It is this consideration, which, in the hour of discouragement and of temptation, the servant of Jesus may well call to his remembrance: and it is urged upon you in another form by the great Captain of your salvation; "Blessed are they which are

* II. Tim. iii. 12.

persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

In addition, however, to this argument to patience, derived from the final destiny allotted respectively to Christ's enemies and to his friends, St. Paul, in the last two verses of the Chapter, furnishes an encouragement of a still higher character. It is founded upon the consideration, that *trials for the Lord's sake are the privilege of his chosen servants*. Let us examine the language of the Apostle. "For unto you it is given," says he, "in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." It appears, then, from what is here stated, that to endure persecution and obloquy for a conscientious adherence to truth, is a favor conferred upon us by our divine Master; a distinction; a high and peculiar honor: and is an allotment which fully as much originates in the goodness of God, as does that faith, whereby we become interested in the eternal blessings of the gospel of peace. And that such is actually the privilege of the people of God, St. Paul demonstrates to the Philippians by referring to his own remarkable example. "Having the same conflict," he tells them, "which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me:" or, to express his meaning more fully—Why should you be surprised at your present fiery trial? It is the proper path of the Redeemer's servants: for that which you are now enduring is of a similar kind with those sufferings, which, as ye are witnesses, I myself was called to bear at Philippi; and corresponds also with my present captivity, of which the tidings have filled you with such unfeigned commiseration.—Now, in answer to the inquiry, wherein consists the blessing of

* Matt. v. 10.

being thus reproached for the sake of Christ, it would be quite sufficient to say, that this dispensation is one of the most salutary exercises of the Christian's faith and graces ; and that, though not for the present joyous, but grievous, nevertheless, afterward, through the divine blessing, it worketh the peaceable fruit of righteousness. But St. Peter has pointed us to a still more delightful representation of the beauty of the believer's sufferings. He tells you, that you are thereby treading in the steps of that Master, who, for your sakes, endured the cross, and despised the shame ; and, in the language of congratulation, exclaims, "Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings."* Such, then, undoubtedly, was the ground, upon which St. Paul declared to the converts of Philippi, that to be ridiculed, and scorned, and misrepresented, was the great happiness of the redeemed servants of God ; and that, accordingly, it was the road on which they were most generally called to travel, while proceeding through these lower scenes to their incorruptible inheritance. Is it the experience, therefore, of any of you, my beloved hearers, that to take up the cross, and to follow Christ, and to be separate from a vain and wicked world, is to be the object of raillery from open enemies, and from inconsistent Christians ? Comfort yourselves with the reflection, that in all this there is nothing strange, nor new ; go back over the past generations of mankind ; and see, that, because it is a glory to partake of the Redeemer's sufferings, prophets, and apostles, and martyrs, were your predecessors on this same thorny path of hatred and of opposition. Let this remembrance accompany you in all your intercourse with those, who are yet in the blindness of the carnal mind.

* I. Pet. iv. 13.

It will animate your spirit ; it will arm you with constancy, and fortitude, and holy elevation above human opinion ; and your deportment will resemble that of the primitive apostles, of whom it is said, " And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name."*

* Acts, v. 41.

LECTURE VI.

CHAPTER II. 1—4.

If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

THE Apostle, through the greater portion of that Chapter upon which we are now entering, continues the series of practical admonitions recently commenced; and, by the affectionate and solicitous manner in which he delivers these precepts, illustrates one of the distinguishing features of his Christian character. If there be any thing by which the great author who penned this Epistle is peculiarly marked, it is a perpetual anxiety for the spiritual walk of those who were Christ's servants, and candidates for a world of glory. This desire within his mind proceeded from various and powerful motives. Surrounded as were believers by enemies and gainsayers, he was

eager that they should do honor to the grace of Christ by a consistent conversation ; and evince to men, that the religion by whose influences they professed to be governed was a living reality. Made acquainted himself, through the teaching of the Holy Ghost, with that immense weight of obligation under which Christians are laid, by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, he longed to see the people of God testifying their inward sense of this debt of gratitude ; shewing forth their thankfulness by a course of holy living ; and, in their tempers, dispositions, and affections, glorifying Him who had "bought" them "with a price," through all the periods of their journey. And when we consider, further, the Apostle's habitual contemplation of that world of purity, into which "there shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth,"* it is not surprising that he should be ever laboring, both in regard to himself and to others, after higher measures of resemblance to its blessed and holy inhabitants. Under the influence of these united considerations, he pursues, in the words now to be considered, his course of fervent and solemn exhortation.

The precepts here addressed by St. Paul to his friends at Philippi, are introduced, you perceive, by an affecting appeal to several motives, calculated to win their attention. These are contained in the opening verse of the Chapter ; and are successively urged with great tenderness of expression. The Apostle entreats them, first of all, by that alleviation of his sorrows and sufferings which he had a right to expect from them, as brethren in the faith of one common Lord. "If there be therefore," he exclaims, "any consolation in Christ : " as if he had said—May I reasonably look for a compassionate

* Rev. xxi. 27.

desire to sooth my afflictions, from those who are joined with me in the bonds of the same divine Master? By this sacred duty, then, comply with the admonitions which I now transmit to you; and, while lying in tedious captivity, let me be cheered with the tidings that you are "perfecting holiness in the fear of God."* He next calls upon them by that affectionate regard for his person, upon which he might properly rest with confidence. "If any comfort of love:" meaning thereby to say, that their attachment to him, and the joy which that attachment, thus shown by their compliance, would convey to his own bosom, ought to be a sufficient inducement to lead them into obedience to his wishes. The third argument which he advances, is grounded upon the unity of sentiment and purpose existing between these fellow-Christians and himself, by their common enrolment within the church of the Redeemer. "If any fellowship of the Spirit," says St. Paul: and he refers, in this expression, not to the participation, by believers, of the blessings and graces of the Holy Ghost, but to that agreement in mind and wishes which he describes in the Epistle to the Ephesians, when he says, "There is one body, and one spirit."† The words under consideration might, therefore, properly be rendered, "if any communion in spirit:" intimating, that the Apostle considered it the duty of the Philippian converts, as professing to be governed by the same great views and objects with himself, to lend a willing ear to his parental admonitions. The imprisoned servant of the Lord appeals, last of all, to their feelings of compassion for his present wretched condition. "If any

* II. Cor. vii. 1.

† Eph. iv. 4.

bowels and mercies," he exclaims; intending, by these pathetic terms, to beseech them, as they would pour one ray of light into the darkness of his captivity, to let him hear that they were adorning their profession by a correspondent walk and conversation.

Such is the brief preface, with which he commends to his Christian brethren the injunctions that follow. You perceive that the motives here urged are entirely of a *personal* character. He does not, until afterwards, place the practical duties of the gospel upon the higher ground of resemblance to the image of Christ: and this blending of merely human, with heavenly and spiritual considerations, is exhibited with equal tenderness in some of his other writings. Thus, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, he speaks to them as their afflicted minister and friend: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."* And in the Epistle to Philemon, he expresses himself in the same touching manner. "Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ."† Now by nothing, my brethren, more than by this occasional appeal to the earthly sympathies of the heart, does St. Paul evidence his desire to build up believers in the graces and holiness of the gospel. His object, upon the present occasion, was to lead the Christians of Philippi to the practice of every thing that was excellent, lovely, and of good report. Knowing, however, as he did, the deep importance of

* Eph. iv. 1.

† Philem. v. 9.

the end he had in view, he determined to present to them every various excitement to obedience ; and, accordingly, addressed them on the ground of their strong and unshaken attachment to himself, as their father in the gospel of Jesus. To the Apostle they had, some time since, become united, in the bonds of a most intimate friendship ; they had enjoyed his animating presence in the midst of them ; and, while receiving from his lips the consolations of divine truth, and the message of a free and full salvation through the Redeemer's blood, had proved, in its highest extent, the power of a Christian affection. This same object of their love was now consigned to imprisonment, and removed from their vision : and he deemed it, with great reason, a very probable means of quickening their advances in the divine life, to implore them by their commiseration of his cruel bonds ; by their desires to diminish the burden of his sorrows ; by all their past and present devotion to him, as the appointed instrument of their change from the darkness of unbelief, to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Such was his method of address to these distant converts ; and it is not to be doubted that it had its efficacy, in impelling them to seek after increasing conformity to Him, who was " holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners."*

Having thus endeavored to gain the hearts of those to whom he was writing, St. Paul proceeds to convey to them some additional practical exhortations.

The *first* in order is presented to you in the second verse, and is thus expressed ; " Fulfil ye my joy," that is, complete the satisfaction and delight which I experienced, when you

* Heb. vii. 26.

were first converted to the way of life: "that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." At the very first reading of this admonition, you will be reminded of a similar precept which occurs near the conclusion of the former Chapter; and which formed one of the topics of consideration in the preceding Lecture. The Apostle's object, both there, and in the language before us, is to recommend Christian union and harmony, on the common ground of the gospel; and the duty of forgetting unimportant differences, for the great object of glorifying, with one heart and mouth, the Author of our eternal redemption. Now this injunction he considered so highly useful in its character, as to deserve being again urged upon the view of his brethren: according to a liberty, therefore, which he is seen allowing to himself frequently upon other occasions, he presents the admonition a second time before them, and in almost the same expressions. Let us turn to his language. "That ye be like-minded," he observes; that is, instead of being in continual warfare with each other, let your desires, and affections, and hopes, be all one in the love and service of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Having the same love;" in other words, being filled with mutual affection, however, as to some points, differing in private opinion. "Being of one accord;" that is, mingling spirit with spirit in a perfect communion of feeling. The only difference between the precept now under review, and that which is found in the foregoing Chapter, is in the last words of the verse before us. They stand in our venerable Version, "of one mind:" but this translation conveys hardly an adequate idea of the precise meaning of the sacred

Apostle. Literally rendered, the expressions of St. Paul would be, "minding *the one thing*," and he hereby describes very happily that heavenly spirit, which, passing by all lesser considerations, leads Christians to labor together after the single, paramount, glorious object, of becoming renewed day by day after the image of God, "in righteousness and true holiness."*

The advice, therefore, now given to the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, is *to sacrifice minor objects to the great end of increasing in personal religion*. And I may properly take occasion, my brethren, from these words, to observe, that it has ever been found true in the history of the church of Christ, that, in proportion as a spirit of eagerness for lesser points has increased among believers, "the one thing" here referred to by the inspired penman has been less ardently coveted and sought; real, heart-felt, spiritual piety, has visibly declined; and amidst contentious anxiety in behalf of favorite dogmas, or ceremonial observances, the weightier matters of the law have been utterly neglected and forgotten. This statement, so accurate in its application to collective bodies of Christians, will also hold good with reference to individual believers. Some, indeed, there may be, who, with the most strenuous and controversial activity for their own views of discipline, and of subordinate articles of faith, have combined an intimate communion with God, and uncommon spirituality of life. These instances, however, by their very rareness of occurrence, rather offer grounds for thankfulness, than at all diminish the force and correctness of the position: and, if we turn our eyes around us, and survey the various professors of

* Eph. iv. 24.

the religion of Jesus within the range of our own observation, we shall discover that the most distinguished for their humility, their heavenly-mindedness, their attainments in all that marks the character of the real children of God, are not those, likewise, who are kindling the flames of controversy within the bosom of the church; alienating brethren from brethren; and sacrificing at the shrine of their own cherished opinions the peace of Christ's spiritual kingdom. Be it ours, therefore, in remembrance of the brevity of life, and the great work which the Father has given us to do, to impress the apostolic rule before us indelibly upon our hearts. "One thing is needful," said the Saviour of men: after this let us strive: and make it the supreme end of our transitory being, to have Christ formed within us, "the hope of glory."*

Another precept of the Apostle is contained in the third verse; and sets forth, in most attractive terms, the important duty of *Christian humility*.—Upon this subject he thus expresses himself: "Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." The admonition thus addressed to the Philippian believers related, in all probability, principally to their deportment in managing the concerns of the church: being intended as a caution against arrogance and rivalry; and an incitement to the cultivation, in all their doings, of a meek and self-renouncing disposition. Like the various other precepts, however, contained in the blessed volume of life, it was meant to regulate the conduct of the servants of Christ under all possible circumstances: and we may imagine the Apostle as saying to each of us, in our respective situations in

* Col. i. 27.

the present world—Guard, with strictest watchfulness, against that conceited temper, which pays no deference to others; and, instead of thus pertinaciously upholding your own opinions, and exalting your own wisdom, look with respect and self-diffidence upon those with whom you mingle in the intercourse of life. The exhortation of St. Paul, as thus explained, corresponds exactly with another which is found in his Epistle to the Romans; “in honor preferring one another;”* and also with that addressed by him to the believers of Ephesus; “with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.”†

I do not know, my brethren, that there is any one quality more conspicuous in the real Christian, than this disposition to think lightly of himself, and to view with esteem and reverence the attainments of his fellow-men. There is a simplicity in such a man, which accompanies him wherever he proceeds; and which no power of intellect, and no extent of human learning, can destroy or diminish. The reason of this remarkable fact is sufficiently easy of explanation. Humility is the regular habit of every converted mind. Through divine grace, the believer has been brought to an inward and abasing conviction of his state as a sinner before God; he finds nothing in self upon which he can rest with complacency and satisfaction; and, by this daily and hourly view of his spiritual emptiness, he is led, by degrees, to form the same lowly estimate of all his mental qualities, and of every personal attainment. He is thus prepared to listen, with a quiet and unobtrusive spirit, to the instructions of other men; he is “swift to hear, and slow to speak;”‡ and, in the communication of his own

* Rom. xii. 10.

† Eph. iv. 2.

‡ James, i. 19.

sentiments and knowledge, is characterized by a manner the very reverse of inflated consequence, and dictatorial arrogance. Such being the necessary result of that inward change, by which the proud heart of man is made to bend before the foot of the Redeemer's cross, the Apostle very properly urges, upon those who name the name of Christ, the cultivation of so distinguishing an evidence of the sincerity of their profession. It is evident to every attentive observer of the Christian world, that there are very many, among the professed members of the kingdom of God, in whom this self-complacent disposition, condemned in the words before us, is reigning in its fullest extent. In conversation with their fellow-men, they are found dogmatically stating their opinions, and adhering to them with vain pertinacity ; and, whenever brought, by the business of life, into collision with others, are uniformly distinguished as those whom neither argument nor persuasion can ever constrain to yield. Of such disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, it seems no breach of charity to infer, that divine grace has never in reality effected a renewing change within their hearts ; or it would certainly have stamped upon their characters that meek and humble spirit, which so effectually marks the servants of God. To these, therefore, the admonition of the Apostle addresses itself with peculiar force : it seems to ask them for the fruits of their conversion : it bids them cease to claim the title, before they have exhibited the qualifications of the believer. It is to be observed, however, that, as it is the Spirit's work upon the soul only to subdue, not to eradicate, the evil propensities of nature, so there are those among real Christians who occasionally, in the inter-

course of life, manifest some remains of the arrogance that distinguished their unconverted mind. With respect to these, then, we are not hastily to conclude that they are as yet destitute of the renewed heart. The proper course is to compare the present extent of this proneness to self-conceit, with that which marked them in other days ; to see how far it has been overcome ; and thus to find a new evidence of the triumphs of the gospel, in the victory which it has achieved over the original disposition of their fallen and corrupted nature. In the mean time, the very fact that even many Christians are thus, in some slight degree, at variance with the principles of their calling, is the most powerful of excitements to lead us all to watchfulness and prayer ; to daily self-examination ; and to constant aspirations after larger, and still larger measures of conformity to Him, who was “ meek and lowly in heart.”*

St. Paul gives the Philippians, in the fourth verse, *another injunction exceedingly useful in its character ; the duty of cultivating a generous and accommodating disposition, in the daily intercourse of the world.*—The precept is thus expressed ; “ Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others :” and the Apostle means to condemn that selfish spirit, which leads men to keep a single eye upon their own interest and advantage, to the total disregard of the welfare of others. The admonition is delivered in very similar language, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians ; “ Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth.”† And, in another part of that same Epistle, it is stated as one of the characteristic marks of Christian “ charity,” or love, that she “ seeketh not her own.”‡ You will perceive, by at-

* Matt. xi. 29.

† I. Cor. x. 24.

‡ I. Cor. xiii. 5.

tending closely to the phraseology of the sacred writer, in the passage now under consideration, that he by no means intends to forbid a reasonable degree of attention to the promotion of your own happiness and profit. When he says, "Look not every man on his own things," he means to say, that this is not to be your exclusive aim : for immediately afterwards he adds, "but every man *also* on the things of others ;" that is, seek what is useful and comfortable for yourselves ; but, at the same time, have some reference, in your actions, to the well-being of your fellow-men.

Now the command here given by St. Paul may be understood as applying, first of all, to the grand duty of consecrating some portion of life, and talent, and property, to the advancement of the best interests of mankind. The Christian casts his eyes around him ; and beholds, wherever he turns, a world groaning under spiritual ignorance, or under the temporal evils of life. Toward these, his heart, if properly affected, will be drawn with a noble benevolence of feeling ; he will strive for their illumination ; he will assist in the alleviation of their miseries ; and, even if the object asks for some sacrifice of time, or for a reasonable measure of his worldly goods, he will cheerfully, and with delighted spirit, contribute the boon. Wherever, therefore, my brethren, as you travel through the pilgrimage of life, you meet with a professed servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, who shuts up his soul within the narrow circle of self ; who never expands his views, to behold the condition of this ruined globe upon which he dwells ; whose labors, whose endowments, whose possessions, are all employed upon personal objects, and confer nothing toward the general good ; turn from such an one to the admonitory lan-

guage of the Apostle, and read, in explicit terms, the futility of his pretensions.

There are, however, some subordinate parts of the believer's conduct, to which the precept before us may very reasonably be presumed to refer. This kind and yielding regard to the comfort of others, should accompany the Christian through all the scenes and circumstances of his life; give a gentleness to his social intercourse; and make him ever ready to prefer, to his own convenience, that of the friends among whom Providence has placed him. And experience does, indeed, most assuredly prove, that it is in the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, above all other men, that the spirit of genuine politeness is found to dwell. The religion of the gospel takes off the natural selfishness of the human character; creates a desire to promote the good, and to study the pleasure of others; and its operation is particularly to be seen among the ruder classes of life, and in those who, before the illumination of the grace of God, were only engaged in the unyielding pursuit of their own profit and advantage. After this attractive spirit, be it yours, my beloved hearers, daily to strive. Drink into the spirit of your Master. Learn a lesson of self-renunciation at the foot of the cross. As you travel through these lower scenes, keep ever before your eye the image of Him, who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

* Matt. xx. 28.

LECTURE VII.

CHAPTER II. 5—11.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus : Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God : But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men : And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name : That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth ; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

IN those four previous verses of the present Chapter, which formed the subject of my last Lecture, the Apostle had urged some important duties upon merely *personal* considerations. He now takes higher and more spiritual ground ; and exhorts the Christians of Philippi to the practice of holiness, from the example of the once lowly and suffering, but now glorified Captain of their salvation. The propriety of addressing renewed believers with such an argument is easily perceived.

When the Christian, through faith, receives the atonement of the Saviour of men, he makes the love of Jesus Christ, as displayed in that astonishing sacrifice, the object of his daily and grateful contemplation. St. Paul, therefore, rightly admonishes the professed disciple, to bear in mind this heavenly model with reference to the precepts he was now enforcing; and to become moulded, by degrees, into those same gracious dispositions, which characterized our adorable Master. The last duty to which the attention of the Philippians had been called, was that contained in the fourth verse. "Look not every man," says the Apostle, "on his own things, but every man also on the things of others;" implying that disinterested spirit, by which, from a desire to promote the welfare of others, an individual is willing to forego his own comfort, and his own advantage. In order to excite those to whom he was writing to the cultivation of this lovely virtue, he brings before them the incarnation of Jesus Christ; setting forth, in that act of the Redeemer by which he left his glory, and took upon him the infirmities of our nature, the perfection of self-sacrificing benevolence. The subject thus presented to your consideration, is in delightful unison with those reflections to which the present season, more especially, invites the Christian believer.*

In exhibiting the infinite good-will of the Saviour of men, and the disinterested character of his visit to the world, the Apostle states

1. *The glory of that condition which he left.*—"Let this mind be in you," he says, "which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be

* This Lecture was delivered on the Sunday after Christmas-Day.

equal with God." By the expression "form of God," he intends to represent that majestic glory in which the Deity resides; and which seems to be referred to in the First Epistle to Timothy, where the King of kings is described as "dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto."* In that Chapter of St. Matthew's gospel which records the splendid transfiguration of Christ, the words rendered "he was transfigured before them,"† signify properly, "he changed his form;" that is, instead of his ordinary appearance, he became enveloped in another of surpassing radiance. This passage throws light upon the words before us: and shews us, that the Apostle intended to carry the thoughts of the Philippians to that effulgence in which the Godhead is enthroned; and of which the Redeemer likewise equally partook, before his descent to this lower world for human redemption. Such, then, was the grandeur of Christ's original condition: he was encircled with the splendors of divinity: and, accordingly, St. Paul tells us, in the place now under review, that he "thought it not robbery to be equal with God;" that is, he considered it as no usurpation of privileges and honors to which he had not a rightful claim, to require the same homage for himself that is paid to the almighty Father.—From this exalted estate, therefore, which the Redeemer of sinners relinquished for a season, the sacred writer leads you to infer the infinite benevolence of his sacrifice, for man's apostate and perishing race. Let us dwell, for a few moments, upon the idea here presented to our contemplation. A world of sinners is lying, hopeless and condemned, beneath the sentence of a violated law. These offenders against heaven turn their eyes in every direction for

* 1. Tim. vi. 16.

† Matt. xvii. 2.

deliverance, and turn them in vain ; they look, and there is none to save ; and the penalty of transgression still hangs over their heads, with all its accumulation of horrors inconceivable in degree, and eternal in duration. A Deliverer interposes ; and, in order that others may be pardoned and restored, consents to leave his own privileged condition, and to descend to the habitations of men. And who is this Saviour, for those who cannot save themselves ? It is He who, from eternal ages, dwelt in the fulness of the Father's glory. It is He to whom thrones, and dominions, and principalities, and powers were subject. It is One who, as being the King of the universe, was surrounded by all the accompanying grandeur of this august station ; and before the intolerable brightness of whose majesty the angels veiled their faces. Such is the Personage, who, for the purpose of man's rescue, visits these lower scenes for his appointed season. My brethren, you *cannot adequately* estimate the magnitude of this self-renunciation, exhibited by the Son of God for dying sinners. But, *so far as you can* grasp it within finite comprehension, let it call forth your profoundest astonishment, and your tenderest love. Jesus divests himself of his glory ; leaves behind him the infinite majesty of the Eternal's throne ; and, "though rich, yet for your sakes becomes poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."*

Having thus described the condition which Christ Jesus relinquished, when he undertook the salvation of men, St. Paul proceeds to set forth

2. *That which he assumed.*—This part of his account of the Redeemer's incarnation, is contained in the seventh and

* II. Cor. viii. 9.

eighth verses of the Chapter before us.—Notwithstanding the original glory which he possessed, yet, says the Apostle, he “made himself of no reputation.” These words imperfectly express the force of the author’s language; which signifies properly, that the Lord Jesus emptied, or divested himself, of that divine splendor in which he was once enthroned, as the Maker of things visible and invisible. You are told further, that he “took upon him the form of a servant:” that is, after having been possessed of the outward grandeur and appearance of Deity, he assumed the appearance and condition of a person among the lower orders of mankind. The Apostle also says, that he “was made in the likeness of men:” or, in other words, he went so far, for the redemption of the human family, as to unite himself with our infirm and sorrowing nature; and the observation is similar to another of the same inspired writer, in his Epistle to the Romans, that “God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.”* But he carries us still farther, in his delineation of that lowly and suffering estate, of which Christ became the voluntary subject. “And being found,” says he, “in fashion as a man,” that is, resembling in all respects one of us, only without sin, “he humbled himself;” or, to convey the meaning more fully, he submitted to every form of ignominy, and to every species of personal privation: “and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross;” that is, to such an extent did he carry his free and willing performance of that atoning work, which the Father had given him to finish, that he refused not even to expire by an agonizing and public execution, with the commonest and basest malefactors that suffer the penalty of their

* Rom. viii. 3.

crimes.—It is in these affecting terms, that the Apostle describes the earthly condition of the incarnate Saviour of mankind ; and, in the various expressions here used, he seems to utter this one idea—Not only did the Lord Jesus Christ, for man's redemption, disrobe himself of his heavenly glory, but he illustrated his self-renouncing regard for others by entering into the opposite extreme of misery. His benevolence was not simply negative, in consenting to be, for a season, without that dignity which belonged to him ; but it was exhibited in a positive endurance of all those calamities, griefs, and pains, which are the heritage of dying men. How overwhelming, my brethren, considered in this view, is the representation here given you by the sacred writer, of the disinterested love of that Friend of sinners ! He not only leaves heaven, but he passes through the sharpest sorrows of earth. There is no degradation to which he does not subject himself, as he travels on his pilgrimage of mortality. He is the victim of cruel insult ; he has not where to lay his head ; he is assaulted by wicked hands ; he ascends a tree of shame and torture, and yields up the ghost ! Such was the Redeemer's incarnate career ; and the words before us, which describe it, may be properly placed by the side of the prophet's anticipating strains. "He is despised and rejected of men ; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief : he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows : he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities : the chastisement of our peace was upon him ; and with his stripes we are healed."*

After having thus illustrated the two-fold representation

* Isaiah, liii. 3. 4. 5.

given by St. Paul, of Christ's original exaltation, and of the condition which he assumed, it seems proper, my brethren, briefly to apply to your hearts the moral lesson with which he accompanies the statement. St. Paul had been enforcing the duty of becoming divested, as far as possible, of the selfishness of unrenewed nature ; and of sacrificing personal considerations to the well-being of your neighbor and friend. As the highest of all excitements to the cultivation of this affectionate spirit, he proposes the example of the Lord Jesus : bidding the Christian to carry in his heart, wherever he goes, the remembrance of that self-renouncing Master who came to die for the guilty. "Let this mind," says he, "be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." With this same intention, permit me now to hold up to your view, the incarnate "Apostle and High Priest of our profession."* Is there within this congregation the man, who, while millions are perishing for lack of knowledge, will neither consecrate one moment, nor devote one least portion of the gifts of Providence, to the diffusion of gospel truth among these wanderers in thick darkness ? Look at this Author of human salvation. That men may be rescued from condemnation, brought back to the favor of God, and crowned with eternal felicity in his heavenly kingdom, he leaves "the glory which he had with the Father before the world was ;"† he is "brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth"‡. Is there here the person, who, in the daily intercourse of life, consults no comfort, no advantage, no pleasure, but his own ; and who, not even in a single instance, is discovered forgetting the accommodation of self, in his wishes to secure the

* Heb. iii. 1.

† John, xvii. 6.

‡ Isaiah, liii. 7.

happiness of another? Turn to the model which the Apostle furnishes; and be convicted; and imitate. For whose interests did Jesus meditate, when he forsook that bright condition, and “humbled himself to be born of a virgin?” To whom had he regard, when he suffered himself to be scourged, and buffeted, and scorned? Whose happiness was in his eye, when, without resistance, he was nailed to the ignominious scaffold, and bled, and died? Keep before your view this stupendous exemplification of love, and you will need no argument more powerful; it will melt your hard spirit; it will lead you to see the heavenly beauty of that disposition of mind, which seeks, and strives, and prays, for the prosperity of a brother man. And it is from their knowledge of the efficacy of this divine example, that the inspired writers are so constantly, in their pages, holding it forth as the incentive to every generous affection. Be it yours to study it day by day; endeavor to imbibe more and more of the mind of the Lord Jesus; and your conduct will by degrees exhibit, that which is now perhaps little manifested, the warmth of a disinterested, generous, and beneficent heart. “Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.”*

From this description of the voluntary humiliation of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostle, before proceeding in his course of practical admonitions, passes to a brief, but magnificent representation, of the Redeemer's *present exalted condition*. This subject is treated in the ninth, and two following verses; in which he represents, in terms of wonderful eloquence and

* Rom. xv. 2. 3.

majesty, the station of our divine Lord on the throne of his mediatorial kingdom. Let us examine the words which he employs. "Wherefore God also," he declares, "hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:" by which he means to say, that the Saviour of the world, having performed the great atonement for iniquity, has been invested by the Father with supreme dominion; and that the honor, dignity, and authority, which he has thus received, are such as none has ever yet possessed, or shall possess in days to come. The universal power which the Lord Jesus, thus elevated as the Head of his church, exerts over all created beings, is thus expressed. "That at the name," or, before the authority, "of Jesus, every knee should bow; of things in heaven," that is, of all the celestial intelligences; "and things in earth," namely, human creatures who inhabit this lower world; "and things under the earth," that is, persons who have departed out of the present state by death, and the legions of the spirits of darkness.* All these are, in one sense or in another, the subjects of the once crucified, but now ascended Redeemer: for either, like the renewed believer, they adore this Finisher of their faith with gratitude and love, or they are compelled, amidst punishment and chains, to acknowledge his supremacy and glory. This idea the Apostle again expresses in other terms: "And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the

* I have thus, according to the view of several expositors, explained the meaning of St. Paul's expressions, "things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;" because I think there is grandeur in the idea which such an interpretation suggests. It is more than probable, however, that the Apostle intended, by these words, to express simply the universality of Christ's dominion. Instances of a similar kind of phrascology, in the sense of *all things without exception*, are to be found in Rom. viii. 38. 39; and Rev. v. 13.

Father ;" or, in other words, it shall indeed come to pass, that there will be no living person, who shall not, either voluntarily and with joy, or by the power of this Redeemer's arm, do homage to him as the Sovereign and King, and the object of universal worship.—St. Paul intends, therefore, simply to state the doctrine, that the blessed Jesus has finished his work of humiliation, and has gone upward to preside as the Lord and Governor of the universe ; and the words are very similar to a passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians, where it is said, that God hath " raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."*

Having thus illustrated the language of this description, permit me to call your attention to one or two important reflections, which it obviously suggests to the mind.

And 1. Let the believer, in this astonishing contrast between the low estate of Jesus on earth, and his present glorious exaltation, discern a new cause for adoring and grateful love.—The ordinary mode, my brethren, in which the Christian estimates the extent of the Redeemer's benevolence, when he came down to bleed for sinners, is to go back to his original glory as one with the Father, and equal with him in essence and in perfections : and then to follow him to these lower scenes as the babe in the manger ; as the despised of Nazareth ; as the heir of infirmities and pains ; as the victim of wicked insult, and of excruciating death. And overwhelm-

* Eph. i. 20. 21.

ing, indeed, is such a view of Him, who, while clad in the full radiance of Deity, yet hesitated not himself to "bear our sins in his own body on the tree." The description, however, here given us by the Apostle, of the condition of the Lord Jesus subsequently to his atoning sacrifice, furnishes the spiritual mind with another, and equally affecting exhibition, of his wondrous and condescending love. Who is this Person, that consents to take upon him human griefs, and to lay down his own precious life for the iniquities of the world? It is actually he, who, after he has paid the penalty of death, ascends to the throne of universal government; from whose sway no created thing is exempted; whom men, and angels, and devils worship, as the sovereign and resistless King. Rise, therefore, in imagination, from the earthly humiliation of your incarnate Saviour, to that dazzling height where he is now enthroned; and, as you survey him there, think within yourselves; Such a Being it was, who "gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair:"* such an One is He, who exhausted to the dregs that cup of indignation, which the Father gave him to drink: thus mighty in his own right was the Intercessor, who stood between God and sinners, and, by his agony, and blood, and shame, averted the blow. This, then, is one of the practical uses, to be made of the statement here exhibited to your view, of Christ's mediatorial exaltation. He who left heaven for a cross of ignominy, is no less a Potentate than the Lord of all: and, as he sits upon his throne of glory, hears from adoring myriads that anthem of worship, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and

* Isaiah, l. 6.

riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing !”*

In conclusion : You perceive, my hearers, that to this ascended Mediator it is said that every creature shall be subjected ; and shall acknowledge, either willingly or by constraint, his authority and power. It appears, then, that, in this kingdom which the Lord Jesus Christ governs, there are two descriptions of subjects. In the one class are unbelievers—and worldly men—and the impenitent spirits of darkness ; and these, when the dispensation of grace shall have terminated, will be consigned to a state where they shall be compelled to submit, and, as they bow the knee, shall tremble. In the other class are those rejoicing and happy persons, who, feeling the resistless claims upon their obedience possessed by this once lowly, but now exalted Redeemer, freely yield him their hearts ; adore, love, and serve him, as their divine Saviour from the guilt of sin ; and, conscious that they are “ not their own,” but are “ bought with a price,”† take Christ Jesus as the delight of their souls, and their portion forever.—And now, my beloved brethren, permit me to inquire, In which of these two ranks of subjects to the Prince of peace, are you, at this present moment, to be found ? What is the spirit in which you are living, in reference to that blessed Being, who, when the fulness of time was come, submitted to the penalty of transgression ; and then rose to that seat of glory, where he now reigns as the Sovereign of all ? Are you among those heartless and impenitent spirits, who are in no other sense the subjects of Christ, than as being enemies, who, in the appointed

* Rev. v. 12.

† I. Cor. vi. 20.

hour of retribution, must be eternally "put under his feet?"* Are you passing your days in thankless forgetfulness of all that he has done, and all that he has suffered? Are you refusing to admit his just authority over your hearts and lives; drowning the remembrance of redeeming love amidst the vanities of the world; and proclaiming aloud, in every part of your career of practical infidelity, "We will not have this man to reign over us?"† Oh, rash and thoughtless spirits! Carry forward your reflections to that day, when this once crucified, but now ascended Jesus, shall appear in the glory of the Father, with his holy angels, to execute summary "vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."‡ It is then that this exaltation of the Saviour to his throne of power, which you have been now considering, shall be disclosed in all its grandeur; but, at the same time, shall be full of horror and bitterness for you. How shall you feel within yourselves, in that desolate hour, to be among those for whom is reserved, not the welcoming smile of the Redeemer in his judicial character, but his frown of righteous indignation? Now, then, in the season of grace, pardon, and mercy, yield up your hearts to the Author of your redemption, in a free and willing obedience: and defer not the moment of submission until that final scene, when they that have not voluntarily accepted his love, shall be constrained to acknowledge him amidst "chains of darkness."§ Seated upon his station of authority, he shall cast his eye upon those, who, while life and opportunity lasted, refused to be his obedient disciples, and to conform themselves to his

* I. Cor. xv. 25. † Luke, xix. 14. ‡ II. Thess. i. 8. § II. Pet. ii. 4.

will : and, with a voice, at whose terrors they will call upon the rocks to fall upon them, and the mountains to cover them, he shall utter forth the command ; " Those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither, and slay them before me."*

* Luke, xix. 27.

LECTURE VIII.

CHAPTER II. 12—16.

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputings : That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world ; Holding forth the word of life ; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

THE Apostle, after having turned aside for the purpose of exhibiting our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as the highest example of disinterested benevolence, returns, in the verses now to be considered, to the pursuance of his regular series of practical admonitions. Deprived, by the afflicting hand of Providence, of the privilege of beholding these beloved Philippians in the flesh, he thought of them with intense anxiety ; and, convinced himself of the paramount importance of eternal salvation, was deeply concerned for their progress in those fruits

of holiness, whose end is "everlasting life."* In this spirit of solicitude for their advancement in the Christian course, he delivers the exhortations which have just been read; and they address themselves, with equal force, to believers of every age and clime.

The *first* of the apostolic precepts before us, is one of a *general* character; and is thus expressed. "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed," that is, in conformity with the past example of holiness which you have afforded, "not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." The Apostle intends to convey the idea, that any departure, on the part of the Philippians, from the accustomed perseverance of their endeavors, merely because his eye was no longer upon them, would argue a servile disposition; and that it was now incumbent upon them, in a greater degree than ever, to evince their sense of the importance of that heavenly walk and conversation, which prepare the believer for the presence of God. The language in which the present admonition is conveyed, is worthy of close attention. St. Paul exhorts the disciples of Christ to "*work out*" their attainment of life eternal. The expression denotes active, ardent, unremitting exertion; and implies that, in a world so full of temptations, and so beset with obstacles to the spiritual life, nothing short of an engaged and earnest pursuit of the one, grand object, will ensure complete success. This same representation of the gospel course, as one of strenuous devotion to the work, is to be found in other parts of the word of life. "Let us labor therefore," says the Apostle to the Hebrews, "to enter into that rest."† "Wherefore the

* Rom. vi. 22.

† Heb. iv. 11.

rather, brethren," says St. Peter, "give diligence to make your calling and election sure."* It is with reference to the difficulties and perils of the Christian pilgrimage, that St. Paul here enjoins also the duty of continual caution, and self-distrust. "With fear and trembling," are his words : as if he had said ; The believer's life is a warfare with the great enemy of souls, and with the suggestions of a corrupt heart within ; maintain, therefore, constant anxiety and circumspection ; and walk as one, who is every moment apprehensive of a fall. The admonition is similar to another of the same Apostle, which is thus expressed ; "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."†

Now I may with confidence, my Christian brethren, venture to declare, that the propriety of this two-fold injunction of the inspired author, in regard to activity in the race to heaven, and to the cultivation of a holy jealousy and dread of temptation, is abundantly confirmed by the inward experience of the servants of God. Every view which the Christian takes of his calling, leads him to see more clearly the necessity of an engaged and strenuous mind, in the great aim of personal sanctification. The obstacles with which he meets remind him, that the kingdom of heaven is to "suffer violence," and that the violent must "take it by force ;" and, beset as he is by temptations without, and by a deceitful heart within, he arrives at the conclusion, that it is only by giving neither sleep to the eyes, nor slumber to the eye-lids, that his soul can become a temple of the Holy Ghost, and the seat of heavenly affections, tempers, and desires. Still more plainly, however, does the

* II. Peter, i. 10.

† Heb. iv. 1.

believer perceive the need of that self-suspicious, and apprehensive spirit, which is here described under the appropriate names of "fear and trembling." The gospel of Christ calls him to the supreme love of that Saviour, who "first loved"* him : but he finds himself continually apostatizing to the service of a present and perishable world. He is enjoined, as in the commencement of the Chapter before us, to cultivate that spirit of affectionate unity with all Christians, which overlooks minor shades of distinction : but, when he examines his own course, he discovers continual relapses into a narrow bigotry of feeling. He is commanded to put on a humble mind : but he views, with grief, that vain conceit too often reigns predominant. He is besought to clothe himself with that disinterested temper, which is ever employed upon the good and the happiness of others ; and yet, when he surveys his own pilgrimage through the world, he perceives that selfishness is the chief ingredient in his daily character. The servant of God thus learns, in the school of Christian experience, to place no confidence in his power of resistance ; and, in the recollection of his weakness, sees the fitness of those scriptural declarations, "Happy is the man that *feareth always*."† "Pass the time of your sojourning here in *fear*."‡

The exhortation thus given by the Apostle, to activity and caution in the Christian life, he accompanies, in the following verse, with a declaration full of encouragement. Mark his language. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." It is as if he had said ; While you pursue your laborious conflict with Satan and the world, and are anxiously and diligently aiming at new accessions of

* I. John, iv. 19.

† Prov. xxviii. 14.

‡ I. Pet. i. 17.

holiness, be not disheartened : there is One on high who is ever at hand to sustain you ; and who, by the living energy of his Spirit, produces within the heart every good desire, every holy resolution, and every varied attainment in grace, with constant delight and readiness. These words embrace some considerations, particularly worthy of attention ; and which it shall be my endeavor briefly to unfold.

And let me call your minds, in the *first* place, to the *important doctrine*, which is here so unequivocally stated by St. Paul ; namely, that *there is not one holy thought, intention, or act, of any human creature, which does not proceed from God's Spirit as the Author*.—Let us turn again to the language under consideration. You are told that it is the Almighty “which worketh in you to will ;” or, in other words, without Him the first inclination, or wish, to become obedient to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, could not arise within your hearts. You are assured, further, that it is the same blessed Being who enables you “to do ;” that is, the whole course of your Christian life, and your ability to bring those good desires into practice, proceed from the Giver of every perfect gift.—Permit me, my brethren, to invite your closest attention to a statement, so calculated to humble the pride and vanity of the human heart. The representation here made discloses the fact, that you cannot breathe forth one aspiration after what is excellent and of good report ; that you cannot advance a single step in that path of obedience, by which you evidence the reality of your Christian profession, and become meet for the kingdom of heaven ; independently of the blessed Spirit of grace from above. In this utter helplessness and poverty of your moral condition, discern rea-

sons for the deepest abasement; and, while you perceive your own inability to render an acceptable service, renounce every plea of merit before the footstool of divine compassion. And yet the doctrine here asserted, plain and positive as is the language in which it is conveyed, meets with decided opposition from many that profess to take Scripture for their guide; but who, in the arrogance of their hearts, are perpetually contending for a sort of union, in the work of salvation, between human virtue, and a divine strength which comes to help out man's imperfections. To those within the present congregation, if such there be, who, not able to receive the declaration before us, are endeavoring to evade its obvious meaning, let me present the confirming testimony of that Liturgy, whose petitions they are every week breathing. What mean you, when you address God as the Giver, "from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed?"* In what sense do you utter your supplications to Him as the Being, "of whose only gift it cometh, that his faithful people do unto him true and laudable service?"† Terms like these speak a language that cannot be mistaken; and of precisely the same import is the declaration of our Tenth Article. "The condition of man after the fall of Adam, is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith, and calling upon God: wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will." And when, from these merely human authorities, we turn to the pages of divine revelation, we

* Collect for Peace. † Collect for Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.

find them to harmonize, wherever we cast our eye, with the assertion of St. Paul under review. What is the declaration of the Lord Jesus? "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."* How speaks he upon another occasion? "Without me ye can do nothing."† What is the observation of the Apostle to the Ephesians? "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works."‡ From such delineations of the book of life there is no room for escape: and, however humbling to the proud and independent views of the carnal mind, they must force us to exclaim, in the honest and lowly spirit of Bishop Beveridge; "Truly if it hath pleased my glorious Maker to entrust me with any understanding of his holy Scriptures, this must needs be the purport and meaning of them."§

But *again*: If the Apostle's language thus lowers the pretensions of the creature, by ascribing all the glory to the Creator, does it not also speak *with strong consolation to the desponding pilgrim to heaven*?—The believer, sinking under the power of temptation, and trembling at the future difficulties of his way, is ready to lie down in despair: but, coming to the Volume of life, and fixing his eye upon its gracious promises, he finds an almighty and merciful arm interposing for his rescue. There is a fulness of comfort in the phraseology of St. Paul, to which I have not yet directed your attention. "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his good pleasure*;" as if he had said—This grace which renews and sanctifies the heart, and brings forth within it increasing fruits of holiness, it is his delight to communi-

* John, vi. 44.

† John, xv. 5.

‡ Ephes. ii. 10.

§ See his Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles; Art. x.

cate ; and upon every spirit that asks for its succors, they shall plentifully descend. Observe, then, my Christian friends, how seasonably the declarations of God's heavenly word come in to relieve your anxious doubts. In every conflict, his aid is nigh ; in every period of your spiritual journey, he travels by your side ; in all your apprehensions of failure, he whispers the animating assurance, " My grace is sufficient for thee : for my strength is made perfect in weakness."* And in the same language of encouragement does the Apostle's declaration address itself to those, who are as yet destitute of that first great change, by which the soul becomes converted unto God. Those views which have been exhibited, of the absolute need of a divine agency for every holy thought and deed, have perhaps led some unrenowned spirit to the reflection ; If such be the exclusive origin of Christian affections, vain is every personal effort ; and, unless the blessed Almoner shall vouchsafe to me the gift, heaven's portals are barred against my entrance. Turn to the declaration of the inspired composer. The same Lord who is mighty in strength, is here revealed as also rich in love. He stands ready to enlighten, and sanctify, and save, all that ask him in sincerity for the boon ; he has, times without number, displayed his mercy, in those convictions of the Spirit with which he has alarmed and invited you, in common with every inhabitant of earth ; and the character of his dispensation is thus briefly, and emphatically described, " It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."†

The *second* precept here delivered by the Apostle, relates to the cultivation of a *contented and submissive temper*,

* II. Cor. xii. 9.

† Luke, xii. 32.

under the appointments of a gracious Providence.—"Do all things," says he, "without murmurings and disputings;" that is, While travelling onward through life, avoid that fretful disposition, which is ever complaining of heaven's arrangements; and which, in looking at the situation and privileges of others, is prone to indulge in envious repinings. This spirit of dissatisfaction with the allotments of God Almighty, is referred to by the same Apostle, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians; where he says, "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer."* Perhaps there is no more striking evidence, my brethren, of the wickedness of the human heart, than the habit, here described, of questioning the propriety and goodness of dispensations, proceeding from the Fountain of mercy. Such a temper was not uncommon during the primitive periods of the church, in relation to the variety of spiritual gifts; and proceeded to so disgraceful an extent, as to demand the particular and urgent remonstrances of St. Paul in his official capacity. It is precisely the same querulous and discontented mind, however, which distinguishes man in all ages of the world; and which is seen exhibiting itself, in some slight degree, even among the spiritual servants of God. To be thoroughly and meekly resigned, in whatever sphere the wise Disposer may see fit to place him, is one of the last lessons which the Christian disciple learns. He admits, and believes that his heart also feels, the excellence of all that is ordered by Him, who doeth right in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: but to apply this truth for his comfort, amidst the darker visitations of heaven; to be patient

* I. Cor. x. 10.

under poverty and privation ; to see others on the heights of life, and himself in the vale, with cheerful acquiescence ; here it is that he finds his weakness, and the triumphs of a sinful spirit over the clearest deductions of his reason. He goes forth into the world : he perceives the inequality of privileges, that separates men from men : and the spectacle is apt to provoke him into bitterness ; peevish complaints ; indignation, that, among the multitudes of God's creatures, he himself has not a better place, and higher marks of distinction. Such a tendency, though not, indeed, prevalent, is occasionally to be found, in the ranks of those whom grace has renewed ; and it was for the benefit of these, that the sacred Apostle penned the admonition before us. If there be those, within this assembly, who stand in need of the caution, let them bear it in solemn remembrance. "Be content with such things as ye have."* "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time."†

This admonition to a peaceful and submissive spirit, the Apostle proceeds to enforce by some powerful motives. These occupy the last two verses of the portion before us ; and are highly interesting in their character.

The *first* inducement which he presents to the Philippians, is the consideration of the happy influence which, by such a course, they would exert upon the enemies of truth. Let us examine the terms in which this idea is conveyed. "That ye may be blameless ;" that is, without affording to wicked men any just ground for censure : "and harmless ;" in other words, not injuring any man by asperity of tongue, or envious expressions ; and thus fulfilling the Saviour's injunction, to be

* Heb. xiii. 5.

† 1. Pet. v. 6.

"wise as serpents, and harmless as doves:"* "the sons of God;" shewing yourselves, namely, by your mild, amiable, and acquiescing temper, to be indeed born of the Spirit, and not Christians in name merely: "without rebuke;" that is, by your consistent conversation, escaping reproach; "in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life." The Philippian converts were dwelling amidst a people, wandering from the straight road of truth, and ignorant of their best interests: and their situation was the same with that of believers in every age; whose lot is cast, wherever they may be thrown, amidst scenes of spiritual wickedness, and among those who know not the way of life. The peculiar blessing and glory of Christians, while thus living in a blind and unbelieving world, the Apostle describes by a very significant allusion. He compares them to the heavenly bodies: declaring, that, as those luminaries of the sky dispense their rays through the darkness of night, so they, called by divine Providence to a knowledge of the truth, are privileged to instruct, convince, and lead men to a reception of Christ, by their exhibition, in daily life, of the efficacy of that religion which they profess.—Behold in these words, then, my brethren, the constraining motive, by which you are invited to adorn the gospel of Jesus, in the midst of an adulterous and perverse generation. The unbelieving, the sceptical, the blasphemers of truth, perceive your good conversation: they see your actions corresponding with your principles: the cavils with which they would fain assail you, are removed: and, perhaps, by the perseverance and regularity of your deportment, some malignant spirits become persuaded that the servants of Christ are

* Matt. x. 16.

in the right, and that all else are in error. The admonition before us is somewhat similar to another, contained in the tenth verse of the preceding Chapter ; where St. Paul counsels the believer so to conduct himself, that he may be "without offence, till the day of Christ." Bear this precept in mind, ye that, in the Saviour's language, "are the light of the world." Be not Christians in name, and yet, by your evil tempers, by your selfishness, or by your frivolity, shewing that you are destitute of any inward grace, to distinguish you from others : and "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."*

The *other* inducement placed by St. Paul, before the eye of the Philippian believers, is that of the joy, which, by their walk of holiness, they would give him at the last and solemn judgment. "That I may rejoice," he exclaims, "in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain." How beautiful is the idea here presented to your contemplation ! He bids them carry their views forward to the hour, when all kindreds, and tongues, and people, shall be arrayed before the tribunal of the Redeemer : and asks them whether they feel no affectionate wishes, that, when that period shall have come, he who had toiled, and striven, and prayed for their salvation ; who had been instant in season, and out of season ; and whose life had been consecrated to the daily work of bringing sinners into the way of peace ; may look with a smile upon them, as the seals of his ministry, and the evidence that he had not wasted his strength for a shadow.— I know not how the Apostle could have selected a more affect-

* Matt. v. 16.

ing consideration, by which to awaken the believing heart to diligence, in the grand business of preparation for eternity. It is the office of the minister of Christ to preach the gospel of the kingdom, to a hard and impenitent world. He pipes to those that will not dance, and mourns to them that will not lament; and his cry, at every day's recurrence, is that of the prophet of old, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"* Now, in the midst of these saddening discouragements, there is one thought which pours light into the drooping heart of the herald of salvation. Notwithstanding the coldness of some, the impenitence of others, and the worldly conversation of too many among the Saviour's professed disciples, he does discern one small, but faithful band; and, as he marks their separation from the world, and the noble consistency of their lives, he exults as he anticipates the day, when, pointing to these tokens of his success, he shall lift up his voice, and exclaim, "Behold, I, and the children which God hath given me!" And is there nothing, my beloved brethren, in such a consideration, which speaks in impressive language unto you? Shall it not be yours, through the grace of the Lord Jesus, so to fashion your deportment by the standard of the gospel, and so to endeavor both to live and die, that you may, in your own persons, add to the number of those, who shall thus awaken a thrill of rapture within the bosom of him that has labored for your good? Is it not an impulse to your diligence, to reflect that the prayers of the ministering servant of God shall thus be crowned with accomplishment; that his anxieties shall be repaid with joy; and that with unspeakable

* Isaiah, liii. 1.

gratitude he shall realize the fact, that they for whom he toiled in time, are to share with him in the glories of eternity? Keep this thought ever present before your vision; and through your instrumentality, in part, the promise of Scripture shall be realized to the messenger of truth; "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall, doubtless, come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him."*

* Psalm cxxvi. 6.

LECTURE IX.

CHAPTER II. 17—23.

Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me. But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. But ye know the proof of him, that as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel. Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me.

THESE words of the Apostle are characterized by the same spirit, that so eminently distinguishes him through the whole of this beautiful letter ; a longing for the holiness, and final salvation, of those to whom his admonitions and encouragements were addressed. While proceeding with him through the successive topics upon which he dwells, we are at no loss to discover what feeling it is, that is ever uppermost in his thoughts ; but perceive plainly, that it is with him a matter of small moment whether prosperity or suffering, life or death, is to be his

own allotment, provided that they for whom he has labored are in the way of truth and of safety. Let us follow him through the several illustrations which he affords, of this absorbing zeal for his Master's kingdom, in the portion selected for your present consideration.

Having, as we have seen, spoken, in the sixteenth verse, of the transport with which, at the last great consummation, he should be filled by the presence of those faithful believers, who had "endured to the end,"* the Apostle proceeds to signify still further his anxiety for the spiritual progress of the Philippians. The manner in which he expresses his regard for this one, great object, is singularly sublime and striking. "Yea," he exclaims, "and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all." St. Paul intends, in the language here used, to declare, that, provided he could discern in their conduct the marks of a renewed and sanctified condition, there would be nothing appalling to him even in the prospect of immediate martyrdom; but that, under the comforts of such a spectacle, he should be enabled with cheerfulness to mount the scaffold, or to bend his neck beneath the sword. Such is the noble feeling of the Apostle: let us examine a little more closely the phraseology in which he has expressed it.

The words rendered "if I be offered," signify properly, "if I be poured out as a libation;" and he hereby compares his own death, in the cause of Christ's gospel, to those drink-offerings under the Levitical dispensation, which were always added to the sacrifice. The same allusion is adopted in the Second Epistle to Timothy; where St. Paul, speaking of his approach-

* Matt. xxiv. 13.

ing decease, says, "I am now ready to be offered,"* or rather, I am now poured out, as a libation to the Lord Almighty. Keeping up the metaphor, the Apostle describes the spiritual attainments and graces of the Philippians as being the offering, which he as a minister should present to God; and upon which he himself was afterwards to be poured forth before the Lord. "If I be offered," he declares, "upon the sacrifice and service of your faith;" that is, if I shall be slain, after having presented your holiness of life and character, of which, under God, I have been the promoter, as an oblation of a sweet savor to my heavenly Father. This representation of the obedience, and Christian virtues of believers, under the similitude of a sacrifice presented to God, is of quite common occurrence in the pages of scripture. One remarkable instance is to be found in the Epistle to the Romans; where St. Paul thus expresses himself: "That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost."† And again, in another part of the same Epistle, he says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."‡ After this illustration of the terms here used, you will be able to comprehend clearly the meaning of the Apostle: that, even if it should please divine Providence to cut him off by a violent death, yet, in the view of their progress in the life of God, he could triumphantly yield up his breath; and could find room, amidst his sufferings, only for congratulating them on their growing ripeness for the heavenly country.

* H. Tim. iv. 6. † Rom. xv. 16. ‡ Rom. xii. 1. See also I. Pet. ii. 5.

My beloved brethren, permit me to hold forth, for your near inspection, this remarkable example of Christian love and heroism. The great Apostle of the Gentiles, engaged in the very thickest of the fight for the gospel of his Lord and Master, looks every moment for a death of torture from the hand of relentless persecution. From such a termination of his career of earthly existence, who would not shrink with affright? Yet he could even exult in the prospect: and upon what consideration is it, that he can thus rise superior to all the influences of natural terror; and wait, with delight, for the approaches of the last enemy in his most appalling guise? It is the thought, that he shall leave behind him these faithful Philippians, steadily pursuing the race that was set before them, and marching onward to their heavenly crown, which raises his spirit in glorious victory over the creature's fondness for life. To see the honor of God promoted in the holiness of his servants, and immortal souls ripening for the skies, was enough for him: it robbed martyrdom itself of its horrors: it made him welcome with a smile the blow, that should give him a place among that "noble army" of confessors, who have sealed the truth with their blood. In comparison with such a spirit, how do the very brightest examples of merely worldly heroism fade into insignificance! You have often, on the pages of history, met with accounts of distinguished leaders, who, in the hour of victory, have received their mortal wound; but who, at the sight of their country's glory untarnished, and an enemy subdued, have sent forth from their eye a beam of rapture, and have rejoiced as they expired. Over the recital of these instances of love of country, triumphing over death, you have lingered with admiration: and yet place them by the side of the

Apostle's feeling, as expressed in the language before us,—and where are they? In their case, it was devotion to the honor of the land which gave them birth, that made them think lightly of the king of terrors: in his, it was a supreme and invincible zeal for the glory of God, as set forth in the obedience of his people. With them, it was exultation that an earthly foe had been conquered: with him, it was the transport of beholding Satan vanquished, sin subdued within the heart, and those for whom he had preached and labored travelling to their recompense of reward. The whole difference, therefore, between these respective examples, lies in the superiority of a heavenly, above a merely earthly mind: and, accordingly, history furnishes no parallel to the sublimity of St. Paul's sensations, when he looked from the spiritual prosperity of his Philippian brethren, to a speedy and cruel martyrdom. "None of these things move me," he seems to cry; "neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."*

From this expression of his cheerfulness in the prospect of death, when coming under such circumstances, the Apostle passes to an admonition, of a very useful kind, to the Philippian converts. It relates to the manner in which *they*, likewise, ought to conduct themselves, under the expectation of his speedy departure. "For the same cause also," he says, "do ye joy, and rejoice with me:" meaning hereby to tell them, that, in consideration of that usefulness of which the Lord Jesus Christ had been pleased to make him the instrument, and which was exemplified in their own conversion unto

* Acts, xx. 24.

God, they ought not to repine at his loss ; but should rather bless the Father in heaven, that he had not removed his servant before he had been enabled to leave multitudes behind him, as the fruits of his labors, and as additions to the number of such as shall be saved.

It is thus that he cautions those to whom he was writing, against inordinate dejection at the contemplation of his death ; and may not Christians of every period of the world apply the exhortation of St. Paul, to the correction of a very common propensity in themselves ? It pleases divine Providence, at various times, to remove his ministering servants to their reward, not after a lengthened career of labor, but in the very meridian of their life and usefulness. Now, when so mournful a visitation is inflicted upon the church of God, it is allowable in believers, as it was in the faithful brethren of Philippi, to shed some tears for an efficient herald of the gospel, struck down from his post of service. It is recorded on the page of sacred history, that “devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him :”^{*} and not to feel grief at the loss of persons, who have been signal blessings to their generation, would argue a thankless insensibility to that divine goodness which consecrated them to their work. There is, however, a degree to which this regret is frequently seen to be carried, which is mingled with much ingratitude and distrust. Many who are present are able, in all probability, to testify from their own experience to the fact which I have stated ; and to say, that, when God has seen fit to call hence some distinguished messenger of truth, either in our own, or in other lands, they have immediately broken forth into unqualified sorrow : they

^{*} Acts, viii. 2.

have entirely overlooked the years of active exertion, during which his Master spared him to the church and to mankind : and, instead of thanking the Almighty for the past, have sighed, with unbelieving spirit, over the departure of a faithful laborer from the field, where his efforts were so deeply needed. Of such a mode, then, of receiving these afflictive dispensations, the language of the Apostle speaks in terms of implied, and strong disapprobation. He bids you acknowledge, with grateful praise, the good which, through God's blessing, his departed ministers have been permitted to effect : and, if your heart be ready to despond at the sight of the void which they have left, he would have you to know, that the same grace that fitted one ambassador for his office, can qualify another to occupy the station from which he has been summoned. At the prospect of St. Paul's removal from the vineyard, the believers of Philippi trembled, perhaps, for the fate of the Redeemer's church and religion. But has not this kingdom of the Prince of peace been continually advancing from that day to the present ? " Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man ? I have planted, Apollos watered ; but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth ; but God that giveth the increase."* The right mode, in truth, in which to estimate the ministering servants of Christ, is to consider each of them as an instrument selected by Providence, for the performance of some limited work ; and which, when the appointed task is finished, he can without the least detriment lay aside. All that the greatest human agent can effect, proceeds from the blessing of the

* I. Cor. iii. 5. 6. 7.

almighty Head of the church ; and, therefore, when he is called away from this scene of labor to his promised rest, the vacant place is filled by the same superintending Governor, from whom his attainments and his usefulness were derived. To that Sovereign of the universe, be content to trust the destinies of his own gospel ; and, while you mourn for piety and genius removed from their sphere of influence, let it be with that chastised and complacent feeling, which cries, “ The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord.”*

Having thus expressed to the Philippians his own cheerfulness in the prospect of death, and exhorted them to contemplate with the same feelings his possible removal, St. Paul proceeds to comfort them with a pleasing intimation. “ But I trust,” he says, “ in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort,” or, may be refreshed and exhilarated, “ when I know your state.” The Apostle, it seems, though looking forward to martyrdom as the probable termination of his career, did not consider this event as just at hand ; and, accordingly, contemplated with joy the period, when, by the journey of this faithful messenger, he should receive tidings of their spiritual condition. Such is the encouraging assurance, conveyed by him to these distant brethren ; and he next informs them, in brief terms, on what account he had selected, for this journey, an individual so necessary to his own comfort, and to the exigencies of the church in his immediate vicinity. “ For I have no man,” he declares, “ like-minded ;” that is, there is none here, with the exception of this person, possessed of the same affectionate spirit and

* Job, i. 21.

views with myself; or, as he explains his meaning, "who will naturally," that is, with sincerity and singleness of heart, "care for your state." Timothy, then, it appears, stood alone, among the friends and laborers by whom St. Paul was surrounded, in that catholic spirit, which travels beyond the bounded circle of personal aims and objects, and is solicitous for distant portions of the church of Jesus. From what immediately follows, it is evident that he formed a perfect contrast with those among whom he was acting. "For all," says the blessed Apostle, "seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's:" in other words, each man seems to be bent upon the advancement of his limited and selfish plans; and to have little regard for the general interests of the Saviour's kingdom.—Such was the narrow and little feeling, which, according to the description before us, prevailed in the Roman capital: and the statement here made affords occasion for one or two practical reflections, which I shall briefly offer to your view.

And 1. In the delineation of Timothy's affectionate anxiety for the spiritual welfare of the Philippians, behold the portrait of every real Christian.—The feature in this excellent person's character to which I would point your eye, is his comprehensive solicitude for the cause of Christ, in all regions where the Saviour's name was honored. The journey from Rome to Philippi, at that period, was attended with no ordinary inconvenience and peril: but so intense was the interest which he took in the progress of its Christian inhabitants, that he overlooked every obstacle; and longed to ascertain, by personal inspection, their growth in the faith and graces of the gospel. In this large and lovely spirit, Timothy was a follower of the

great Apostle of the Gentiles, "even as he also was of Christ:"* and it may safely be affirmed, that, if there be one distinguishing mark of a soul renewed by the grace of Jesus, it is that feeling by which it is ever awake to the universal prosperity of Zion; seeks and prays for the increase of all parts of Christendom, in the saving knowledge of Christ; and is constantly striving for the wider extension of sanctifying truth, into the territories of the Prince of darkness, and the dismal "habitations of cruelty."† In these desires for the enlargement of the Redeemer's spiritual kingdom, the servant of God is carried beyond that particular sphere, however important it may be, in which Providence has cast his lot. His heart roves abroad over the face of the earth: wherever there are brethren in the bonds of the same covenant, of these he thinks with interest: wherever there are beings, locked in the slumber of idolatry and superstition, them he wishes to see visited, like himself, with the "day-spring"‡ of gospel truth, and the illuminations of the Holy Spirit of God. My Christian friends, is this your expansive mind? Seek, through divine grace, to make it your own: for if any man profess to be Christ's servant, and yet, in the largest sense of the expression, "loveth not his brother,"§ he is "none of his."||

But 2. In how sad and revolting a light does the Apostle represent the character of some of those primitive professors, who were numbered among the real servants of God! Let us turn again to the language of St. Paul. "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." It is the picture of entire and invincible selfishness; and the most melancholy reflection connected with it is, that it relates to those

* I. Cor. xi. 1. † Ps. lxxiv. 20. ‡ Luke, i. 78. § I. John, iv. 20. || Rom. viii. 9.

who were not merely the disciples, but the commissioned ministers of Christ, to a guilty and miserable world. Invested with this sacred office, so significant of universal love for men, what is the course which they pursue? They travel on their own private ends of fame and aggrandizement; they consult their ease as the great object; they have no feeling to bestow upon a distant corner of the church, and upon persons dwelling on another soil. Humbling as is this representation, it must be received as the literal and sober truth; it is recorded by the finger of the Holy Spirit himself; and, unhappily, it wants not counterparts in these latter days of the gospel dispensation. Some examples are to be found in every Christian land, of persons who, in the course of their ministerial walk, never travel out of the confined and uniform track, to which their avocation has called them; who seem to imagine that they have no duties to accomplish, and no sympathies to exercise, save those which belong to their own professional sphere; and pass onward to the grave in a sluggish inactivity and indifference, exactly the opposite of that unbounded affection for a fallen world, which is so completely the spirit of the gospel. While over such examples we heave the sigh of lamentation, let us, the ministers of the Lord, pray for deliverance from their spirit! Let us seek to imbibe the unrestricted benevolence, that sent down Jesus from heaven, and burned within the hearts of Timothy and of St. Paul: and, as we look abroad over the earth, breathe for all portions of it the apostolic ejaculation, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."*

In the two concluding verses of the portion under review,

* Rom. x. 1.

the Apostle repeats the assurance of his intentions in regard to Timothy ; and accompanies it with the memento, that the Philippians already knew, by personal observation, the faithful character of this servant of the Lord. "But ye know," he declares, "the proof of him, that as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel. Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me ;" that is, when the probable issue of my present troubles shall have been more distinctly unfolded.—These words of St. Paul describe a character of exceeding loveliness. When the Apostle planted the church of Philippi, Timothy was his fellow-laborer in the work : and he is here described as a person, who was ready, under the guidance of his superior, for every exertion and sacrifice ; who willingly, and with glad mind, followed St. Paul's directions ; and spared not himself in any one respect, that he might bring sinners within the holy and peaceful influences of the gospel of Christ. Such was the testimony which these primitive disciples could themselves yield, to the character of that youthful servant of the Lord. He was full of burning zeal : for the Apostle represents him as one, who, with filial reverence, copied his own bright example in his daily walk and ministry ; and what the pattern was that St. Paul exhibited, let his history and writings declare. He was a model of gentleness and meekness : for you are here informed, that to the counsels of his spiritual father he bowed with cheerful acquiescence ; and, instead of being proud, and conceited, and self-willed, exemplified the spirit of his divine Master ; did not "strive nor cry ;"* and put on the ornament of a quiet and lowly mind, "which is in the sight

* Matt. xii. 19.

of God of great price.”* Oh, rare and attractive union of the martyr’s fervor, and the child’s simplicity ! Such heralds of a Saviour’s message, may the great Head of the church increase in large abundance ! May we all aim, with humble earnestness, after the same combination of apparently opposite, but really harmonious qualities of character ; and, while we are filled with the zeal that becometh those, whose office is to bring sinners to God and heaven, yet exhibit the temper portrayed by the Apostle, when he says, that “the servant of the Lord must be gentle unto all men, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves !”† For thus abased a spirit it is, that the highest exaltation of the world of glory is in store ; and the Master, whom his ministers here serve in the labors of his gospel, shall himself pronounce to them the salutation, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant : enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”‡

* I. Pet. iii. 4.

† II. Tim. ii. 24. 25.

‡ Matt. xxv. 21.

LECTURE X.

CHAPTER II. 24—30.

But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly.

Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellow-soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. For indeed he was sick nigh unto death : but God had mercy on him ; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness ; and hold such in reputation. Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.

THE promise given by the Apostle, and which was considered in the preceding Lecture, to send Timothy on a visit of consolation to the Christians of Philippi, was calculated, in no ordinary degree, to animate their drooping spirits. Comforting, however, as it undoubtedly was, it could not, from the circumstances in which St. Paul was placed, be immediately performed ; for the imprisoned servant of Christ was unable,

as yet, to form any certain opinion, in regard to the issue of his present captivity. So long as this question remained undetermined, the stay of Timothy at Rome was highly expedient: but, in the mean time, the patience of those faithful believers might be in danger of being exhausted, by their prolonged separation from their spiritual father, and the absence of that substitute whom he had held forth to their expectations. The plan by which he endeavored to soothe their hearts, is stated in the words which have just been read; and to the consideration of which I would now, in dependence upon the divine blessing, invite your attention.

In the commencing verse of the portion before us, St. Paul intimates to the Philippians a considerable degree of certainty, that he should be permitted by Providence speedily to behold their faces in the flesh. "But I trust," says he, "in the Lord," or, through the merciful interposition of my God and Saviour, "that I also myself shall come shortly." This expectation, however, amounted to nothing more than a reasonable persuasion; and, even should it be realized, it could only be after some little space of time had elapsed. To cheer them amidst these depressing circumstances, he adopted a resolution which is thus stated, in his own affectionate language. "Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellow-soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants." It is probable that Epaphroditus was one of the ministers of the Philippian church: the restoration, therefore, of this laborer to the beloved flock among which he had dwelt, would infuse no small delight into their hearts. Let us examine the description here given by St. Paul, of his character and merits.

He calls him his "brother;" meaning thereby, that he was related to him, not only in the bonds of the Saviour's gospel, but by the additional tie of their common office, as heralds of divine mercy to a sinful world. He styles him, further, his "companion in labour:" intimating very clearly, that, in the discharge of his sacred functions, he shrunk not from any of those toils to which they subjected him; but, with a self-denying perseverance, endeavored earnestly to "do the work of an evangelist," and to "make full proof of his ministry."* His active and laborious disposition is set forth again by the Apostle, when he applies to him the appellation of his "fellow soldier;" referring to the patient trust, and faith in the divine power, with which this minister of Christ contended against the sinful hearts of men, and waged uncompromising war with the world, the flesh, and the devil. This mode of representing the militant character of the ministerial office, in reference to the opposition with which it meets from the carnal mind, is to be found in other places of the Apostle's writings. Thus, in the Second Epistle to Timothy, "Thou therefore," he says, "endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."† And, in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, he declares, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds."‡ After having thus described the qualifications of Epaphroditus as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ, he proceeds to acknowledge, with that simplicity of character which belongs to the real Christian, his obligations to this servant of God as his friend in the hour of necessity. "But your messenger," he says, "and he that ministered to my wants." The Phi-

* II. Tim. iv. 5.

† II. Tim. ii. 3.

‡ II. Cor. x. 4.

lippians, it appears, had no sooner heard of the imprisonment of their beloved Apostle, than they began to devise measures for alleviating the sorrows and privations of his condition ; and, having collected a sum of money, despatched the person here commemorated to Rome, as the bearer of their contributions. Thus sent on an errand of love, Epaphroditus took his departure from Philippi ; carried to the captive what his grateful children had provided ; and, by every form of affectionate attention, sought to diminish the burden of his sufferings. It is in virtue of this office, as the conveyer of supplies from the Christians among whom he lived, that he is here called their "messenger : " a title which seems to have been applied, in the primitive church, to those who were sent any where, entrusted with some special commission. Thus, in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, "Whether any do inquire of Titus, he is my partner and fellow-helper concerning you : or our brethren be inquired of, they are the messengers of the churches, and the glory of Christ."*—From the portrait thus drawn of that ministering servant of God, you may infer that he was possessed of no common attainments in Christian zeal, and Christian love. As a preacher of the gospel, he delivered his message boldly, without accommodation to the pride and corrupt propensities of an impenitent world. As a disciple of Christ, he was ready to every friendly office ; and, with kind and active sympathy, strove to support the venerated Apostle under that afflictive dispensation with which he had been visited. In these few points of character, therefore, he remains as an exemplar to us that follow ; "a burning and shining light"† in his day and generation ; "full

* II. Cor. viii. 23.

† John, v. 35.

of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”*

After this commendation of Epaphroditus, as an active minister, and an affectionate friend, the Apostle gives an additional testimony, in the next verse, to the excellence of his character. His words relate to a signal proof, afforded by this primitive servant of God, of attachment to his Christian brethren. Attend to the affecting description. “For he longed,” says the inspired writer, “after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick.” It appears, from these words, that the messenger of the Philippian church had been visited, while at Rome, with an attack of serious illness : and so deeply distressed was his mind, when he reflected upon the anxiety which this dispensation would cause to his flock at Philippi, that he could not remain tranquil ; and earnestly desired again to present himself among them, and to soothe their affectionate apprehensions. The word rendered “full of heaviness,” signifies extreme depression and misery of soul ; and is used by the Evangelist with reference to the anguish of the blessed Redeemer, when with Peter, and James, and John, in the garden of Gethsemane. “He began,” you are told by St. Matthew, “to be sorrowful and very heavy.”†

In how engaging an aspect, my brethren, does this person, as thus described by the recording pen of the Apostle, stand before your view ! You are here furnished with a striking exemplification of the extent of Christian friendship ; and it may be declared, without hazard, that it is only the grace of the Lord God Almighty that can create within the heart a feeling, like that

* James, iii. 17.

† Matt. xxvi. 37.

which is, in these words, so beautifully commemorated. Examine the real depth of the attachment, manifested by this primitive disciple. He is cast by Providence upon a bed of languishing, while at a distance from the people of his ministry, and from his brethren in the covenant of Christ. Forgetting his own affliction, he travels in spirit to Macedonia; he thinks only of the fears and sorrows of those whom he had left behind; and, when he is restored, desires to comfort them with as intense an eagerness, as if they had been united to him by the ties of natural relationship. Thus it is that believers are linked to each other, as members of the same spiritual body, and travellers to the same eternal inheritance: and there is no affection so firm and strong, as that which has been originally produced by Christian principle, and is cemented by the same hallowed bond. It is with a like trembling anxiety on account of the sorrows of his brethren for himself, that St. Paul also is seen to be moved; when, in his Epistle to the saints of Ephesus, he thus tenderly expresses himself; "Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory."* And, in the same manner, when his intended departure for Jerusalem drew forth the tears of his companions at Cesarea, he could not endure the spectacle; but broke forth into the importunate exclamation, "What mean ye to weep, and to break mine heart?"† Unrenewed nature furnishes no such examples of lively and sympathetic concern, for the sorrows of other men. It is, indeed, true, that persons destitute of the religion of Christ are occasionally found, who manifest some portion of the spirit here depicted; and who, when thrown into afflictive

* Eph. iii. 13.

† Acts, xxi. 13.

or perilous circumstances, are in grief not for themselves only, but for those with whom they are connected by the ties of human friendship, and who are mourning over the wretchedness of their condition. But if you would know where this feeling is most active, and tender, and permanent, turn your eyes to the genuine disciples of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. There you will see love in its brightest earthly exhibitions ; losing sight of self in solicitude for the happiness of others ; and exemplifying the mind of that incarnate Master, who, when he saw the friends of Lazarus weeping, “ wept ”* likewise himself. It was because he was a Christian, that Epaphroditus was thus carried in imagination to his sorrowing brethren at Philippi ; and it is characteristic of that blessed household to which he belonged, that if “ one member suffer, all the members suffer with it.”†

From this information, so gratifying to the Philippians, in regard to the lively interest taken in them by their absent minister, St. Paul proceeds to confirm the report which had reached them, in regard to his dangerous sickness ; and expresses his joy at that valued brother’s recovery. “ For indeed,” he remarks, “ he was sick nigh unto death : but God had mercy on him ; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.” In this description of the restoration of Epaphroditus, there are *two* reflections suggested, to which I would, for a few moments, call your attention.

And 1. Is there not something at first sight rather singular in the observation, that the Lord Almighty, in raising up this excellent laborer from his bed of disease, and prolonging his residence in the world, *performed towards him an act of indul-*

* John, xi. 35.

† I. Cor. xii. 26.

gence? Listen to the words before us. "For indeed he was sick nigh unto death : but God had mercy on him." 'What means this?' you are all ready to exclaim : 'for, if that primitive minister, by being then summoned away, would only have ascended from the field of battle to his eternal rest, where was the peculiar blessing conferred upon him, by thus extending his period of earthly existence? The expression seems appropriate only in the case of those unhappy beings, who are brought suddenly to the verge of the grave while in the midst of their natural alienation from God ; and whom the compassionate Father, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance,"* spares for farther opportunities of faith in the Friend of sinners.'

Now it is, indeed, true, my Christian brethren, that, in respect of that everlasting recompense of reward which awaits the servants of God, it is the highest act of divine mercy to remove them from this present world, to the abiding enjoyments of the other. Here, all is labor and conflict : there, is uninterrupted repose. In this lower state, sin mingles bitterness with life's sweetest comforts : in heaven, pleasure is as unmixed in quality, as it is endless in duration. Still, however, there is a sense, in which that interposition of Providence by which a Christian is saved from death, and continued longer upon these earthly scenes, may be properly styled an act of tenderest kindness and love. Whoever, in the present assembly, is a renewed follower of Christ, knows that it is the habitual desire of a believer, to live to the service and glory of his crucified Master. He does not, indeed, attach the least merit to his feeble doings, nor found upon them the remotest expectation of

* II. Pet. iii. 9.

his final acceptance : but he feels that the Redeemer of sinners has laid him under such immeasurable obligations ; he is so tenderly alive to the necessity of some answering acknowledgment from the creature ; that he cannot abide the thought of passing into the land of spirits, without having, in some little degree, “ shown forth the praises”* of his Deliverer by a career of useful exertion. This, therefore, being the prevailing wish of the servant of Christ, we may conceive the sadness with which he finds himself, in the very flower, or in the prime of his strength, brought to the borders of eternity : and also the light in which he will regard that interference of the Lord, by which he is permitted to live, and not, as was every moment expected, “ taken away in the midst of his days.”† He will consider that the Almighty has dealt mercifully with him ; because he has vouchsafed to him some additional space for doing good in his generation, and thereby promoting the honor of the Lord that bought him. It is on this account that St. Paul, in the former Chapter of this Epistle, looks upon the present existence as, in one view, a blessing ; and, in the prospect of his future usefulness, exclaims, “ If I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor.”‡ Upon the same ground, then, in the instance before us, he describes the recovery of his friend as an exhibition of divine compassion ; and when you consider, that the person to whom he referred was not merely a disciple, but a minister of Christ, the observations which I have made receive new force and value. The ambassador of heaven, even with the privilege of the longest life, can, of necessity, accomplish little towards extending the boundaries of his Master’s kingdom. What, then, will not be his agony of

* I. Pet. ii. 9.

† Ps. cii. 24.

‡ See Chap. i. 22.

spirit, when, in the morning of his glorious and delightful career, he is suddenly arrested by that omnipotent Lord, who appointed him to his stewardship? Submit, indeed, he will; but it will not be without exquisite suffering: in dependence upon the Giver of days, he will pray for a respite: and, if a gracious answer come, he will rise to resume his labors with a transport of gratitude and joy. You perceive, then, that there is truth in the Apostle's representation: and that, if there be gain in "dying to the Lord," there is also unspeakable goodness in permitting the Christian to "live unto the Lord."*

But there is a *second* interesting truth unfolded in the verse under review; and it is this. The Father in heaven, when he sometimes spares the lives of his active and useful servants, not only displays, in these acts of deliverance, kindness to the persons themselves, *but also to those among whom his providence has cast their lot*.—Let me direct your eye once more to the language of the Apostle. You perceive that, after describing the compassion manifested to Epaphroditus in his restoration, he adds the following observation: "And not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow;" or, in other words, the divine Being, by this deliverance of his ministering servant, has displayed the riches of his benevolence to myself; and has not added, to the grief which I endured for the sickness of that fellow-laborer in the gospel, the anguish of mourning for his departure. The person whose recovery is here so gratefully commemorated, was dear to the Apostle as life. He had materially alleviated, by his assiduous attentions, the sorrows of captivity: he had labored in the propagation of the gospel without weariness, and without fear: and it was,

* Rom. xiv. 8.

therefore, acknowledged by St. Paul as a signal favor to himself, that this companion was not separated from him by the grave ; and was permitted to cheer him by his longer exertions for the promotion of the Saviour's truth. My brethren, it is in a similar manner that the God of heaven manifests his goodness, in other instances besides that which is here on record ; and let me ask you, individually, to bring to mind your own past experience of this mercy of the Lord, in sparing for your benefit and happiness the excellent of the earth. Are there not some present, from whom God did not remove their parental guide, before they had been graciously allowed to profit for long years by his counsels ; to look up to him as the model of their deportment ; and to catch from his lips every various and salutary lesson, for time and for eternity ? Are there none of you who can say, that you owe, under providence, your first serious impressions of divine truth, to some friend who had frequently pressed the topic upon unwilling ears ; but who, in the long-suffering of heaven, was not snatched from your side, before he had opened your hearts to the utter vanity of the world, and the incomparable "riches of Christ ?" * Do I not speak to any, who now look back, with affectionate and pensive remembrance, to the instructions of some departed minister of the Lord ; but who did not, in the mercy of God, begin to mourn for his death, before they had acknowledged with transport their own spiritual change, as one of the blessed fruits of his life ? My beloved hearers, by thus carrying your mind over heaven's dealings with yourselves, you will, perhaps, be led to add your own grateful testimony to that of the Apostle before us ; and, with fervent adoration, to thank the Lord, who hath

* Eph. iii. 8.

thus made "the times and the seasons"* subservient to that momentous object, "the salvation of your souls."†

In the three concluding verses of the present Chapter, the Apostle simply states the eagerness with which he was desirous to restore Epaphroditus to his people ; and commends him, as a faithful servant of Christ, to their affection and esteem. "I sent him therefore," he tells them, "the more carefully," or, with the greater haste ; "that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice ; and that I may be the less sorrowful," namely, from the reflection that you are now, after so many fears, and so long a separation, enjoying the presence of your cherished friend. "Receive him therefore," he goes on to say, "in the Lord with all gladness;" that is, give him a truly Christian and cheerful welcome: "and hold such in reputation;" or, in other words, yield to them that respect and honor which their services so eminently demand. He then assigns more particularly the reason, for which the regard of the church of Philippi was due to this minister of Jesus. "Because for the work of Christ," he declares, "he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me:" by which he means to say, that it was owing to his free, active, and untiring devotedness to the promotion of the Apostle's comfort, and to the work of assisting him in the advancement of the gospel, that he had contracted that dangerous sickness which had brought him to the gates of the tomb. In these arduous efforts, he had performed what the Philippians, by their distance from St. Paul, could not possibly effect ; and had created, thereby, a lasting debt of obligation and of gratitude, and deserved to have his deeds held in remembrance.

* I. Thes. v. 1.

† I. Pet. i. 9.

It is impossible, my brethren, to read these expressions of the Apostle, without being struck with the noble features of character, which they display to your view. You perceive, on the one hand, his cheerful readiness to bear testimony to the services of Epaphroditus to himself. This excellent person had been the messenger of bounty from a distant land ; he had visited his spiritual father, now in bonds for the gospel, with the warmth of a filial affection ; and, in obedience to his instructions, had used every exertion to diffuse the knowledge of Christ among the children of idolatry. With that magnanimity, which is so characteristic of the real Christian, St. Paul hastens to speak of the obligations under which he had been placed ; and describes this herald of Christ as a man, whose beneficence he bore, and ever should continue to bear, engraven upon the tablet of his memory. But further : how beautifully does the Apostle exemplify, on the present occasion, that disposition which breathes through every page of his inspired compositions, to exalt in the esteem of mankind, and of his Christian brethren, those excellent of the earth with whom he was travelling on the pilgrimage of life ! What is there here of that petty and narrow mind, which seeks to rob contemporary merit of its well-earned fame ; and, in the fear lest self should be at all the sufferer in public estimation, denies what facts, with obvious testimony, speak in another's praise ? St. Paul had learned, in the school of Christ, a far different lesson ; and burned with a generous love for all that was " excellent, and of good report," wherever, and in whomsoever it might be found. My brethren, let us all strive, with the divine aid, to imbibe the spirit of this great exemplar ! Let us endeavor to put away from us all that distinguishes nature in its uncon-

verted state; to become divested of "the old man with his deeds;"* and to shew forth before men, by the dispositions which we manifest, whose we are, and whom we serve! Through this course of spiritual conformity to the image of God, we may look onward with hope to our heavenly heritage; and, after having been in this world the followers, shall, in the next, be the fellow-heirs, "of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."†

* Col. iii, 9.

† Heb. vi, 12.

LECTURE XI.

CHAPTER III. 1—3.

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil-workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

THE Chapter upon which we now enter brings us to a fresh, and very important subject, for the consideration of the Christian believer. If there be any one feature in the religious character of St. Paul, which more than others distinguishes him, it is his jealous earnestness to erect the superstructure of the believer's hopes upon the only sure foundation; and, in the work of the sinner's deliverance, to take the crown from every other head, and place it upon that of the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. This zeal for the honor of his Redeemer, created within him by the renewing grace of God, was called forth, by the circumstances of the primitive church, into daily and active exercise. Persons, professing to be disciples of the divine Mediator for a guilty world, endeavored, neverthe-

less, to lead away the hearts of his servants to other sources of confidence; and, "going about to establish their own righteousness, did not submit themselves unto the righteousness of God."* Who these perverters of the doctrines of grace were, we shall soon have occasion to see: it will be sufficient at present to remark, that the Apostle opposes them with all his energy; and exhibits Jesus, crucified for sin, as the only name "given among men, whereby we must be saved."†

In commencing this part of his letter of exhortation, he gives a general expression of his sentiments in regard to the duty, incumbent upon believers, of *resting their hopes of salvation upon Christ alone*. There is a tone of decision, and of earnestness in his language, which shews his anxiety for the correctness of a Christian's doctrinal views. "Finally, my brethren, rejoice *in the Lord*:" that is, exult in Him exclusively, as the procuring cause of your acceptance with God; delight in his infinite merits, and precious death; and, whatever others may say, hold to this Saviour as the single medium appointed by heaven, for the recovery of the Almighty's forfeited favor. In the words which immediately follow this brief admonition, the Apostle hints at those enemies of the fundamental doctrine of the cross, whose errors were the occasion of his present urgency in its support. "To write the same things to you," he says,—that is, to repeat advice and representations which I have frequently before given, in the course of my personal ministry among you, or in my writings to other churches, "to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe." He intends merely to say to

* Rom. x. 3.

† Acts, iv. 12.

the Philippian converts, that to insist so often, and so strongly, upon a doctrine of such vital importance, was by no means irksome to him ; nay, farther, that he did it gladly, from the consideration that he was thereby providing a seasonable caution, against the dangerous errors of the times. The purity of the Christian faith was, at this period, much endangered, from the active exertions of a number of false teachers. These men, though professedly converts from Judaism to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, yet endeavored to weaken the grand tenet of justification by faith ; enforced the necessity of circumcision, and of obedience to several other of the abrogated institutions of Moses ; and thus substituted, for the meritorious sacrifice of the Son of God, the righteousness of outward deeds. The extent to which these mischievous corruptions prevailed, may be learned from the various reproofs directed against them by St. Paul, throughout his several epistles to the primitive churches. They sprang from that same spirit which characterizes the unrenewed heart, in all ages of the world : the wish to evade the humbling doctrine of the cross of Christ, and to claim acceptance upon the ground of personal services, and of a life of external obedience. That the Apostle should have been deeply anxious to oppose so perilous an error, cannot be surprising. Himself filled with grateful affection for the divine Author of his redemption, he strove earnestly to preserve all others in a faithful and exclusive devotion ; and, with this view, wrote to his brethren of Philippi, that he might “ stir up their pure minds by way of remembrance.”* In the admonition before us, he counsels them to make the full, perfect, and sufficient offering of Christ,

* II. Pet. iii. 1.

the only ground of their hope and joy ; to cast themselves with thankfulness upon the free offers of redeeming love ; and, instead of leaning to any of those corrupt systems which the pride of man suggested, rather to feel humbled, that, amidst their own utter poverty of desert, divine mercy should thus save them through pure, and gratuitous love, for perishing sinners. To those believers, therefore, of his own day, and to you also, my brethren, he may be here considered as saying ; " Being justified BY FAITH, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ : " * " If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain : " † " God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ : " ‡ " As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him : rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. " §

It is to be observed, however, that, in the admonition thus given to the Philippians to make salvation by Christ crucified the subject of their rejoicing, the Apostle not merely intends to direct them to the Redeemer as their only refuge ; but also intimates the idea, that the believer ought to find in this doctrine, and in the privileges, consolations, and hopes connected with it, a source of pleasure amidst all the varying providences of this mortal life. The fact that, through the atoning blood of Jesus, sin is pardoned, and heaven opened to our possession, is certainly calculated, with him who gives it deliberate and full consideration, to lighten the burden of the severest inflictions, and entirely to " reconcile man to his lot. " ¶ And the power of this truth may be not only theoretically asserted,

* Rom. v. 1.

† Gal. ii. 21.

‡ Gal. vi. 14.

§ Col. ii. 6. 7.

but proved by the experience of the saints of God, in all periods of his church. David, amidst his trials, could exclaim, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased."* In the thick darkness of their prison, Paul and Silas "sang praises unto God."† And, when one of the martyrs of England was led to the stake, he found that the comfortable sense of pardon and salvation, through the all-sufficiency of Christ, triumphed even over pain in its most agonizing form; and declared that the blazing faggots seemed to him as a bed of roses.‡ With the same supporting and cheering power, is the doctrine of Christ crucified invested for each one of you. Through all forms of worldly trial, it speaks the language of peace and hope. Amidst disappointments, temporal losses, severe bereavements, it tells of that blood which has "redeemed from all iniquity,"§ and purchased better things to come: and thus effectually sinks into insignificance present evils, by the overwhelming consideration of that life and immortality, which Jesus has brought to light by his gospel. Apply, then, to your own circumstances, ye that are the servants of Christ, his consolations which are neither few nor small. Derive from the redemption of your souls, through the blood of Calvary, an alleviation for every species of sorrow; think upon its blessedness and value; and, into whatever calamities thrown, "joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement."||

Having thus admonished the Philippians to hold firmly to that doctrine of faith in Christ, so much endangered by the false teachers of the day, the Apostle proceeds to express his

* Ps. iv. 7. † Acts, xvi. 25. ‡ James Bainham. § Tit. ii. 14. || Rom. v. 11.

aversion for these wicked guides ; and to implore his believing brethren not to yield to their devices. The terms in which he describes the character of those perverters of the truth, are exceedingly strong.

"Beware," he exclaims, "of dogs." There is peculiar force in the application of such a name, to the Judaizing instructors who were then disturbing the church. It was usual with the Jews to distinguish the Gentiles, by the opprobrious appellation of "dogs:" and it was in accommodation to this custom, that the Lord Jesus Christ replied to the woman of Canaan, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs."* St. Paul intends to say, therefore, that the name which they thus contemptuously cast upon others, might be more properly applied to themselves ; being exactly descriptive of that greedy and rapacious disposition, by which these teachers, for the sake of their own personal advantage, accommodated their doctrines to the corrupt views of men. That such was the character of those persons against whom he was writing, is evident, not only from a subsequent verse of the present Chapter,† but from descriptions of them in other of the apostolic writings. In the Epistle to the Romans, they are said to be men who "serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly ;"‡ and in the Epistle to Titus, they are represented as "teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake."§ To such persons, the expression here used by St. Paul was obviously appropriate. Their neglect of the cardinal doctrine of justification by faith, and their continual enforcement of the efficacy of the works of the law, were in adaptation to the pride and the prejudices of their hearers ; for fear of offending whom, and

* Matt. xv. 26. † See Verse 19. ‡ Rom. xvi. 18. § Tit. i. 11.

thereby interfering with their own interests, they preached, not what was wholesome truth, but what was palatable to the carnal mind. Such men as these have their representatives in all ages : but let us pass on to the next part of the delineation before us. "Beware," says he, in reference to the same corrupters of the gospel, "of evil-workers." He means to assert, that these individuals were active and laborious, but their exertions were all for a wicked purpose ; and the sense of his words is precisely expressed by Solomon, when, among seven things that are abominable before heaven, he mentions "feet that be swift in running to mischief."* The Judaizing teachers of the Apostle's day were distinguished by their incessant pursuit of their object : for it is a melancholy reality, that the friends of the Redeemer too frequently bear no comparison with his enemies, in the steadiness and enthusiasm of their efforts for the promotion of the cause dear to their hearts. The last name here applied to these persons, is one of a singular description. "Beware," he tells the Philippians, "of the circumcision." The present is the only place, throughout the whole New Testament, in which the word before us occurs. It seems to be a term of derision ; and to be given to the false teachers in allusion to another name, which they, in common with the rest of the Jews, assumed as their peculiar title. We find, from several places in the Epistle to the Romans, that the Jewish people were called "the circumcision ;"† in reference to that initiatory rite, by which they entered into the visible church of God. This distinguishing appellation was, without doubt, made a subject of vain boasting by those pretended Christian teachers, who were endeavoring to enforce upon the reception

* Prov. vi. 18.

† See Chapters iii. iv.

of believers the rituals of Moses : and St. Paul appears, by thus changing the name, to cast ridicule upon the subject of their pride ; and to intimate, that those who advocated a ceremony which was now done away, deserved to be distinguished by no better a title than that of useless mutilators of the flesh.

It is by these three successive terms, that he expresses his strong disapprobation of those perverters of truth, who were then assaulting the faith of believers. To you of the present day the admonition has no farther application, than simply to put you upon your guard against all exhibitions of the gospel, in which the minister of Christ does not lead you at once, and exclusively, to the atoning blood of the Lamb slain for sinners ; in which any encouragement is offered to the pride of your own works and deservings ; and, thereby, the whole character of the religion of Jesus, as a free gift to ruined offenders, utterly destroyed. From representations thus dishonoring to your divine Master, turn away with fear and trembling. Saved by the righteousness of Christ, and by that alone, ascribe all the glory where it is due ; and, to the exclusion of every human pretension and plea, let your scheme of faith be that which Leighton, in his quaint but forcible language, has thus expressed: "Seek and wait for thy pardon as a condemned rebel, with thy rope about thy neck."*

The Apostle, after this description of those insidious and arrogant teachers, sets forth, in distinct contrast, the character of real Christians. He begins with asserting, that, whatever might be the claims of these wicked leaders, the title which they adopted belonged strictly to the servants of Jesus. "For we are the circumcision," he declares ; as if he had said: Those

* See his Commentary on I. Peter ; at Chap. v, verse 6.

men whose principles I am opposing, rest with Pharisaic complacency upon a profitless rite ; the renewed disciples of Christ, on the contrary, are possessed of that inward and spiritual character, of which this was only the sign ; and *who*, therefore, most deserve the name in question, you can without difficulty decide. The words of St. Paul, in this place, are similar to a passage in his Epistle to the Romans, where he observes ; “He is a Jew, which is one inwardly ; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter ; whose praise is not of men, but of God.”* In what respects believers were distinguished from those formal advocates of Judaism, he next proceeds to state ; and his declaration sets forth, for your instruction, *three* important and interesting marks of a genuine disciple.

The first distinguishing feature which he mentions, is that of a *spiritual service to the Lord*.—“We are the circumcision,” he says, “which worship God in the spirit.” It is evidently the meaning of the Apostle, that the renewed servant of the Lord Jesus Christ gives up his heart, and inward affections, to the Author of his creation and redemption ; in distinction from those carnal professors, whose only idea of true religion is that of an outward and ceremonial homage. In this description of the character of God’s converted children, he alludes indirectly to those deceivers of his time, who reduced the way of salvation to a mere observance of external forms. In its general application, however, it pronounces condemnation upon those who pursue the like bleak and barren career, in every age of the world ; and carries your minds to that portrait drawn by your incarnate Master : “The hour cometh, and now is,

* Rom. ii. 29.

when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him.”* Permit me, then, for a moment to present this part of the real Christian’s character to your view, for the instruction of those who, by a public profession, name the name of Christ. The believer looks up to God as his providential Governor and Guide: and while he traces, through past years, all the gracious dealings of his hand, his heart expands; he rises on the wings of devout and holy gratitude; and, with the Psalmist, his soul utters the cry, “Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name!”† But this same person, who thus acknowledges and feels the gifts of the Almighty, in the daily bounties of his providence, turns to him as the Author of still nobler benefits. A rebel, he finds himself restored; an offender against the divine law, he sees himself pardoned; and, in his own guilty and ruined person, perceives the promise fulfilled, “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”‡ At this spectacle of unmerited mercy to the chief of sinners, he glows with a flame of steady, warm, and humble thankfulness. Christ is presented to him as the grand object of his affections. The world sinks beneath his feet. His whole life is a course of love for that adorable Father, “who hath delivered him from the power of darkness, and hath translated him into the kingdom of his dear Son.”§ This, my dear brethren, is what is intended, in the description now under review. St. Paul carefully distinguishes between a religion of the heart, and a mere outward attendance upon ordinances and seasons; and intimates, that he who is bought with a price, should glorify God “in his spirit, which is God’s.”||

* John, iv. 23. † Ps. ciii. 1. ‡ Isaiah, i. 18. § Col. i. 13. || I. Cor. vi. 20.

The *second* feature of character described by the Apostle, as distinguishing the true believer, is *his habit of ascribing every thing, in the work of his salvation, to the Redeemer of sinners.*—This is expressed by the words, “rejoicing in Christ Jesus.” The term rendered “rejoice,” signifies, more properly, to exult, or boast; and implies that a real Christian, instead of contemplating any thing of his own with delight and confidence, triumphs wholly in that cross of his divine Master, which made a world of guilty creatures “accepted in the Beloved.”* There is one point of view in particular, my brethren, in which this tendency of the converted mind may be profitably exhibited; and to which I would briefly call your attention: It is characteristic of him who has been made the subject of renewing grace, that not only does he ascribe to Christ his redemption from the punishment of transgression, but he ascends with gratitude to him as the Source of every thought, word, and deed, in his daily life, which is holy and acceptable unto God. When the believer has become changed from the love of sin to a new and better mind, he “brings forth fruits meet for repentance,”† and corresponding with his spiritual condition; and upon these evidences and results of his faith, he has a right to look with pleasure. But mark attentively, I pray you, the nature and grounds of his satisfaction. Is it in the vain desire to magnify self, that he thus delights to behold, in his walk and conversation, the image of his heavenly Father? In surveying the work, does he forget whose hand has formed it? Or rather may I not say, that, in every part of his course of progressive sanctification, he perceives fresh cause for adoring

* Eph. i. 6.

† Matt. iii. 8.

that Spirit of grace, who has created him anew, by his own omnipotent strength, "in righteousness and true holiness?"* Whatever is effective, he ascribes to himself: whatever is excellent, to Christ, and him alone, he traces with thankfulness and praise. Has he faith? He confesses that this is not his own, but that it is "the gift of God."† Does he exemplify, by every form of beneficence, his love for men? Here, he can find no ground for rejoicing in personal merit: but realizes entirely the force of the Apostle's question, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"‡ In this uniform manner, the disciple of Christ discerns the true source of all that he is, and all that he possesses: and is a living illustration of the command, "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."§

But let me turn your attention to the *last* mark of Christian character, held up to view by the Apostle: *the believer's clear conviction of the inability of his natural powers, to do works acceptable unto God.*—Christians are here described as "having no confidence in the flesh," or, in mere unrenewed nature. They are afraid to depend upon it, because they know its weakness and corruption; as a man hesitates to lean upon a reed for a staff, lest it should break beneath his hand.—This feeling; my brethren, ascribed to the servants of Christ, in the emphatic words before us, however it may vary in different individuals as to degree, yet exists in all who have been brought to an experimental acquaintance with the character of God, and with the spiritual nature of his commandment. Through the illuminating operations of

* Eph. iv. 24. † Eph. ii. 8. ‡ 1. Cor. iv. 7. § 1. Cor. i. 31.

divine grace, the Christian discerns the extent of the Almighty's requisitions ; he perceives that they comprehend not merely the outward service, but entire holiness of thoughts, affections, and desires ; and, having been led to this discovery, he at once renounces the supposition, that, by any of his own deeds before heaven, he can offer up a pleasing and unobjectionable sacrifice. It is in allusion to this realizing consciousness of human inability, as made known by an insight into the divine character, that St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, declares ; "I was alive without the law once : but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died :"^{*} in other words, before I perceived the inward holiness signified by the precepts of Jehovah, I fancied myself acceptable and excellent : but, on the other hand, no sooner had this same moral code been presented to me in all its height, and depth, and breath of requirement, than I confessed my deficiency ; and saw that I was lying under a righteous sentence of condemnation and death.—Such is the experience of the enlightened children of God : and there is certainly no feature of the Christian mind, which needs to be more repeatedly pressed upon your notice, and more frequently urged as the token of a renewed heart. It is difficult for those who have never been brought, by the holy Spirit himself, to a sense of their weakness, to be made to understand this entire renunciation of merely human morality, which distinguishes the Lord's sanctified people. But, for the very reason that many of you are not ready to admit the doctrine, and are blind to the perception of its truth, ought it to be held forth with the more uncompromising plainness : for, upon the pervading con-

^{*} Rom. vii. 9.

sciousness "that in you, that is, in your flesh, dwelleth no good thing,"* depends your cordial reception of the great Physician of souls ; and, by necessary consequence, your entrance into the eternal glories of your Father's kingdom. By this exclusive confidence, therefore, in the righteousness of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and this utter distrust of natural sufficiency, walk in the steps of your father Abraham. Live by faith in the atoning blood of the Lamb. Let his name be all your trust, and all your plea. Thus simple and unreserved a reliance upon the great Redeemer, will be a proper ground for exultation ; and you may with reasonable triumph exclaim : " Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect ? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth ? It is Christ that died ; yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."†

* Rom. vii. 18.

† Rom. viii. 33. 34.

LECTURE XII.

CHAPTER III. 4—9.

Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more : Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews ; as touching the law, a Pharisee ; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church ; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord : for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

THESE words follow, in a very appropriate manner, that description of the true Christian's character, which formed, in part, the subject of your attention in the last Lecture. In opposition to the self-righteous instructors of the day, the Apostle had enforced the necessity of an inward service, as distinguish-

ed from a religion of mere form and ceremony ; and had set forth the Lord Jesus Christ, received in the heart by faith, and in exclusion of every other plea, as the strong foundation of the sinner's hope. In order to add force to these representations, he now proceeds to shew, that it was not because of his own inability to point to works of righteousness which he had done, that he thus maintained the inefficacy of human performances ; for that, on the contrary, if such a ground of acceptance could be admitted, he was ready to establish, beyond power of contradiction, the superiority of his individual claims to the favor of God. Let us see the manner in which he proves this point, by reference to the history of his own life and conduct.

In the description which he now gives, of his external privileges, and unimpeachable rectitude of life, he evidently intends to meet an objection which might be raised, by his enemies, against his doctrine of the inadequacy of man's works to procure everlasting salvation. While he was thus depreciating the merit of every other righteousness but that of Christ, the reply would immediately be made, that he acted upon the same principle with those who rail against advantages, of which they happen to be not themselves the possessors. Thus it is frequently found, that men to whom Providence has denied the blessing of earthly riches, attempt, in an unqualified manner, to lessen its real value. So, likewise, they who decry human learning and accomplishments, are mostly those who, through the divine appointment, or their own culpable neglect, are destitute of these excellent and useful gifts. It holds equally true with respect to every other privilege, that what we have not, we are prone to underrate ; and it was, accordingly, of great importance that the Apostle should be

able to shew, that, if there were indeed any meritoriousness in outward deeds and services, this he possessed to the very fullest extent. "Though I might also," he declares, "have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more." Thus boldly he advances his claims; and then goes on to prove them by an enumeration of particulars.

In the first place, he was an actual Jew; not a mere proselyte from the Gentiles: having been "circumcised the eighth day," instead of receiving the rite, like heathen converts, at the period of adult age. He was "of the stock of Israel;" that is, deriving his origin from Abraham in the line of Jacob; and not, like some other descendants of the patriarch, springing from him through Ishmael, the son of Hagar. In addition to all this, he was "of the tribe of Benjamin." Several circumstances combined to render this tribe peculiarly honorable, in the eyes of the Jewish people. Among these may be mentioned the fact, that, when the ten tribes of Israel revolted, this continued firm in its allegiance, and true to the religion of its fathers.* Besides this distinction, it had another which gave it considerable claims to regard; being that tribe in whose lot Jerusalem was situated, according to the original grant of Joshua when the promised land was divided.† He calls attention, next, to the fact, that he was "an Hebrew of the Hebrews;" meaning by this expression to say, that he counted among his ancestors no persons of foreign race, and that his blood was perfectly unmixed: so that the words might, perhaps, be more properly rendered, "an Hebrew from Hebrews." Having thus described the privileges of his birth, he now

* See I. Kings, xii.

† See Josh. xviii. 28.

passes on to circumstances which, being the result of his own choice, were still more deserving of commendation. "As touching the law," he was "a Pharisee." Of the two prominent Jewish sects, he had embraced that which was held in greatest estimation, and which drew after it the largest proportion of the people. To this distinction the Apostle alludes, in his defence of himself before Agrippa. "My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee."* In connexion, however, with the strong devotion to the traditions of the elders, so characteristic of the members of that body, he could boast of another ground for exultation. "Concerning zeal," he says, "persecuting the church." If it was any reason for obtaining the favor of God, that a man had been notorious for his rage against the enemies of the Mosaic ritual, then he had, more completely than all others, established his justification. The manner in which Saul of Tarsus ravaged the church of Christ, is recorded, in clearest language, upon the page of sacred history. He is described, in the Acts of the Apostles, as "consenting unto" the death of Stephen;† as "making havoc of the church;"‡ as "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord:"§ and, from what is there related, it is evident that nothing could exceed his ardent endeavors; for the maintenance of the faith and worship of his fathers. He concludes his summary by stating with confidence, that, so far as an outward conformity, of the most rigid character, to the letter of the divine commandment, could give him a title to acceptance,

* Acts, xxvi. 4. 5. † Acts, viii. 1. ‡ Acts, viii. 3. § Acts, ix. 1.

he possessed an indisputable claim. "Touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless:" being without spot or blemish; having fulfilled the very least requirement; and, by nothing that he had done, and nothing that he had omitted, liable to the just reproaches of his fellow-men.—It is thus triumphantly that St. Paul demonstrates the fact, that if righteousness came by the deeds of the flesh, then he was entirely sure of salvation; and that, therefore, it was from any other cause rather than his own poverty of outward fruits, that he had been exposing the worthlessness of all human deeds, and the efficacy of Christ alone. He could fearlessly look his opposers in the face; and say to them, in the same words which he employed upon another occasion, "I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit, whereinsoever any is bold, I am bold also."*

Before proceeding to consider the estimate formed by the great Apostle, of these various works of external obedience, as he himself has stated it in the verse that follows, permit me, my brethren, to draw a passing inference from the enumeration just offered to your view. You perceive St. Paul, for the purpose of answering the sneers of his opponents, recounting, in successive order, the deeds of his correct and moral life. You perceive also, that this description, rich and abundant in performances as it is, comes immediately after a declaration of the insufficiency of every plea of human righteousness, to merit life everlasting. Let me be allowed, then, simply to hold up the catalogue of excellencies here furnished, and to say to every individual within these walls; If such a man could find nothing in his walk and conduct, deserving of a recompense from

* II. Cor. xi. 21.

the Lord Almighty, how shall any of you, with better reason, pretend to claim the favor of God upon the ground of blameless rectitude of life? Had St. Paul, after having declared the inefficacy of the works of the flesh, presented us with a meagre summary of actions in his own past career, you might, with some color of justice, have plumed yourselves upon your own superior worth: but, as the facts stand, every refuge of self-righteousness is withdrawn, and you must all perceive your guilt and poverty before God. The Apostle had been subjected to the enjoined rite of circumcision: what is there more meritorious in the regularity of your Christian baptism? He was born of believing parents: can you find any thing better in your own distinction, as children of those that have trained you, from earliest years, "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?"* But let us grant that, in these respects, you are superior to the great Apostle of the Gentiles: yet what can you advance in regard to your moral obedience, which shall evince your stronger title to the favor of heaven? Do you pay a more complete regard than he exhibited, to every precept of the decalogue? Is your course through the world more unexceptionable, in one single respect, than that which he pursued during his unregenerate days? Can you pretend to any thing, in the way of outward service, that can place you above the scrupulous Pharisee; full as he was of justice and virtue, and walking, as he did, "in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless?"† Such a claim, my brethren, the best among you in morality of life cannot venture to assert: and, indeed, the real truth is, that the greater portion of those who rest with confidence upon their personal rectitude, are far

* Eph. vi. 4.

† Luke, i. 6.

inferior to the Apostle in the very deeds, which they, with so much complacency, contemplate. You are driven, then, by the representation before us, to the plain conclusion, that where St. Paul failed, you cannot expect to succeed. You cannot but feel your inability to claim acceptance, on the ground of your own doings, in the sight of Him who is the Judge of men ; and, in the language of the prophet, must cry, " We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags."*

Let us now attend to the language in which St. Paul, after this statement of his spotless integrity of life, sets forth his opinion of its real value. " But what things were gain to me," he declares, " those I counted loss for Christ ;" or, in other words, There was a time, when I considered these outward deeds as being highly profitable and advantageous ; and as the means of purchasing an entrance into that future kingdom, prepared for the people of God. I now view them, however, with far different eyes ; and they appear entirely destitute of worth, when placed by the side of an interest, through faith, in the proffered righteousness and merits of my crucified Redeemer.—Mark the discovery, then, my brethren, to which the Apostle was led by the converting influences of the Holy Spirit of truth. All this course of rectitude, from his earliest youth, he had uniformly been accustomed to regard as so much *placed to his account*, in the book of divine remembrance. Upon this imagination of his vain and darkened understanding, he had dwelt with satisfaction : but no sooner had the light of grace burst in upon his soul, than it dissipated the fond delusion ; he perceived things in their true character ; the former

* Isaiah, lxiv. 6.

sources of his confidence he entirely renounced ; and the performances in which he had most exulted, he found to be "less than nothing, and vanity."* The statement thus made by him, on the present occasion, of the difference between his views before his conversion, and those which he afterwards entertained, is important ; because it sets forth the characteristic distinction between spiritual disciples of Christ, and the proud and carnal professor. The merely moral man sees meritoriousness and "gain," in the external purity of his life : the believer counts it as dross, because, amidst all, the affections are estranged from God, and fastened upon the world. The Pharisaical liver congratulates himself upon something gained, by his acts of daily benevolence : the renewed servant of Jesus Christ sees nothing here deserving of heaven, because these performances have been stained by mixed, impure, and worldly motives. The unconverted soul looks for its coming reward, on the ground of the good things it has done, and of the evil from which it has abstained : the real Christian examines every thing in the light of God's perfect law ; and the conclusion at which he arrives is immediate, and certain, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us ; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."†

In the verses that remain for consideration, the Apostle leads the attention of his Philippian brethren to *two* important declarations. They illustrate so powerfully the character and feelings of the true Christian, as to deserve being held forth as the particular objects of your contemplation and remembrance.

* Isaiah, xl. 17.

† Tit. iii. 5. 7.

The *first* observation which he makes; states his opinion of *the insignificance of every earthly pursuit and pleasure, when compared with a personal interest in that great salvation, which the cross of the Redeemer has purchased.* "Yea doubtless," he declares, immediately after the remark contained in the preceding verse, "and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." By the "knowledge of Christ," of which he here speaks, he means that inward and experimental acquaintance with the Lord Jesus, as his Deliverer from the wrath of God; which is possessed by every true believer; a realizing sense of the value and preciousness of the Saviour's atonement, and of his own interest in its promises of mercy. It is in the same sense that the term is used, in several other parts of the New Testament. "This is life eternal," says the Redeemer, "that they might know thee the only true God; and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." "Till we all come," says St. Paul to the Ephesians, "in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man."† "Grow in grace," is the exhortation of the Apostle Peter, "and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."‡—This it is, which the Apostle places in contrast with the things of a present world; and he may be here considered as saying: Whatever my heart once prized as of eminent value, I now perceive to be what it really is; Christ, and his salvation, I see to be the first and greatest object, and all else to be subordinate; the earth dwindles, and the Lord and Redeemer stands forth to my enlightened vision as the "all in all."§

It may, perhaps, by the divine blessing, edify the believer, and

* John, xvii. 3. † Eph. iv. 13. ‡ II. Pet. iii. 18. § I. Cor. xv. 28.

shew the simply nominal Christian the deficiency of his character, to illustrate, by a few examples, this principle of the Saviour's renewed disciples. Let us take, as one instance, the riches of this life. These, then, are, in the eyes of the worldly man, accounted as "gain." He sets a high value upon wealth; the love of it engrosses much of his thoughts, and the pursuit of it the greater proportion of his time; and to live and die with large possessions, is the single object before his view. Turn to the real Christian. To that cross on which he has crucified every earthly desire, he has likewise nailed his affection for the deceitful Mammon. He lifts his heart from the treasures of the world to the unsearchable riches of the gospel: and, though he labors moderately and diligently for the meat that perisheth, and can enjoy with thankfulness the abundance with which Providence may bless him, yet all seems paltry, while he contemplates that life and immortality which God has given him through his Son. Take, as another example, the several gratifications of the present life. Upon these the unconverted man looks with fondness, and reckons them as valuable "gain." If he be a mere pursuer of pleasure, his heart becomes entirely devoted to the frivolities of life; he esteems them as things of importance, and worthy of all the attention they receive from him; and, in this daily, unintermitted chase after what the world can give, every faculty is occupied. If he be fond of human learning, these acquisitions he cultivates as the highest objects of desire; and, regarding them as the chief good, buries the recollection of all other concerns beneath literature, science, or philosophy. Direct your eyes once more to the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. What to him are the vain enjoy-

ments, by which those around him are amused and deceived? The gospel of the Redeemer, with all its wondrous prospects, has made them contemptible; he looks upon them as shadows; as things which he cannot be induced to notice, while invested with the hope of an eternal portion, and of a throne in heaven. What, in his eyes, appear the pursuits of worldly knowledge? The Christian may estimate, indeed, according to their real value, those acquirements which expand and refine the human understanding. He may travel, to an equal extent with others, over the field of letters or philosophy. Yet, meanwhile, the superior blessedness of the gospel places these things in a subordinate station; he contrasts their littleness with the grandeur of the Redeemer's religion; and, being risen by faith with Christ, he "seeks those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God."* Such, my brethren, is the scope of St. Paul's declaration to the believers of Philippi. The renewed servant of Christ, he intends to say, looks round upon all that the world contains: and then, in the language of the Psalmist, exclaims, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee."†

In addition to the heavenly observation just considered, he expresses, *secondly*, the *cheerfulness with which he resigned all his worldly comforts and advantages, for the sake of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.*" Hear his animating assertion. "For whom," says he, that is, for Christ, "I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ; and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which

is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." When the Apostle refers, in these words, to the losses which he had incurred for the religion of his blessed Master, he means to say, not only that he had given up those pursuits and pleasures in which he indulged in his unregenerate days; but that he had been compelled to endure the severest privations, which a human being can suffer. When the persecuting Saul became transformed, through the efficacy of divine grace, into the ardent and devoted Apostle, what was the immediate consequence? He lost his hopes of farther temporal aggrandizement: for those Jewish ceremonies which he had before maintained with ferocious violence, he now exposed as nugatory and abolished. He lost the pleasant intercourse of his early friends: for those who had once travelled with him on the same road of bigotry and blinded zeal, now forsook him; raved against him with envenomed malignity; and made it their dearest object of desire to recompense his desertion with death. But more than all this he had sacrificed, for "the kingdom of God and his righteousness."* He had resigned even the charms of personal liberty. Who does not love to walk forth in freedom, and to inhale the air at pleasure, and to see the cheering sun? Yet the Apostle could not now congratulate himself even upon this; and the very Epistle on which we are at present employed, was penned within the confines of a prison. Amidst these combined bereavements, see the spirit of his mind. He can contentedly endure all: nay more, he can look upon the delights from which he has been separated as beneath a wish; and consi-

* Matt. vi. 33.

ders them as "the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things!"

My brethren, if there be any among you this day, who are as yet hesitating, from worldly motives, upon the threshold of a Christian profession, come hither, and take a lesson from the great Apostle of the Gentiles. With what impressiveness and sublimity does he speak to you, from the scene of his captivity and sufferings; and call upon you to part at once with every thing that life offers, if standing in competition with that precious salvation, which the cross of Christ has purchased! Is there one individual, then, before me, who is deterred from a cordial acceptance of Jesus, by the dread of being abandoned, ridiculed, and despised, by the companions of his childhood and youth? Look at St. Paul; tread in *his* steps; mark the determination with which he bore in mind his Master's admonition, "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me."* Is there one person here, who cannot resolve to be Christ's, because he may thereby be subjected to some sacrifice of worldly pleasures? Turn to the Apostle; and see the unconquerable steadiness of his purpose to "deny himself, and take up his cross,"† and march through "tribulation"‡ to the Kingdom. This wonderful man holds forth to you, in the language before us, and in the whole history of his converted life, the pattern of a Christian's comparative estimate of this present world, and of the eternal privileges of the Saviour's religion. From him, then, learn your duty; and He whom St. Paul served, and whom every believer follows, has himself announced to you the recom-

* Matt. x. 37.

† Matt. xvi. 24.

‡ Acts, xiv. 22.

pense; "Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."*

* Luke, xviii. 29. 30.

LECTURE XIII.

CHAPTER III. 10—14.

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death ; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect : but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended : but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

THE Apostle continues, in these words, the train of thought which he had been pursuing in the three preceding verses. At the view of that glorious salvation procured by the Lord Jesus Christ for sinners, and of his own personal interest in its blessings, he had declared, as you have seen, the world to be divested of its attractions ; its pleasures to be vain ; the sacrifice of its friendships to be but a trifling surrender, when exchanged for the favor of God, and the future glories of his kingdom. This exalted estimate of the riches of Christ, as being the

one thing needful, he now expresses still further to his brethren of Philippi, and with equal vehemence of feeling. While we proceed in the consideration of his interesting language, let us seek, my dear brethren, to be filled with the spirit that breathes through it; and, in prospect of that solemn ordinance in which we expect this morning to participate,* pray inwardly that we may know nothing among men, "save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

The verse with which the portion before us begins, requires, in order to form a complete sense, to be closely connected with those which precede it. In like manner as he had reckoned every thing as worthless, in comparison with the great object of being pardoned through the merits of his Redeemer, so does he look down upon the world, he here tells us, in view of all the other privileges of the precious gospel of Christ. "That I may know him," says he; that is, become experimentally acquainted with the Saviour, as my Deliverer from the guilt and power of sin. This is *one* of the grand marks at which he aims: another he thus expresses; "and the power of his resurrection." St. Paul, by the "power" of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, understands that efficacy which it possesses in regard to believers; and in virtue of which they, likewise, shall one day be clothed with renewed and incorruptible bodies, and dwell for ever with the Lord. The propriety of the expression will readily appear, when it is considered, that, it is only from the circumstance of our Redeemer having risen from the tomb, and triumphed over the power of the grave, that we can look forward to the same glorious privilege; and, accordingly, St. Peter renders thanks to "the God and Father of our Lord

* Sacrament Sunday.

Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."* St. Paul means to say, therefore, in the words under the consideration, that, in contemplating that result of his Saviour's resurrection, by which he himself should be made the inheritor of a glorified body, and of the eternal happiness of heaven, every thing below seemed stripped of its grandeur and importance. The next privilege, stated by him as an object of absorbing desire, is that of being called to a similitude of griefs with his crucified Master. This he styles "the fellowship of his sufferings;" meaning, thereby, a participation in some of those calamities and persecutions, which were the allotment of the Son of God during his incarnate residence among men. But why is it, that he reckons a life of severe endurances among the number of those blessings, which take from this world, and its concerns, all their interest in his eyes? In answer to this question, it is to be observed that he here speaks, not in reference to these afflictions in themselves considered, but to that future resurrection to life of which they are the necessary precursors. In the days of the Apostle, the road to glory lay through bonds, stripes, and martyrdom; and not only as to that period, but as to all ages of the church, is it the fact, that they who shall "reign" with Christ in heaven, are those also who, by the opposition of enemies, have been made to "suffer"† with him upon earth. Looking at the believer's trials in this their connexion with his final salvation, his mind rose within him; and the sword, the prison, and the cross, seemed possessed of a glory, at the side of which all the pageantry and show of life were robbed of their splendor.

* 1. Pet. i. 3.

† II. Tim. ii. 12.

This ardent desire to suffer whatever was necessary, during his pilgrimage to a better world, is expressed farther in the words that follow: "being made conformable unto his death;" that is, by perils, and cruel inflictions, endured for the gospel, resembling that divine Master who, for our sins, became a man of sorrows, and acquainted with griefs. After all these successive expressions, St. Paul repeats, in another form, a wish already uttered; and, in order to shew the prominent object before his vision, earnestly exclaims, "If by any means," or, through any difficulties and sufferings, "I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead;" that happy state of the servants of Christ, by which, delivered from the incumbrances of this body of sin, they become possessors of a new and heavenly form, beyond the reach of diseases or decay.

From this last expression, then, taken in connexion with that allusion before made to the same topic, you perceive that the Apostle was now raising himself above the love of the world, by the sublime and animating contemplation of the future resurrection of the body. In the anticipation of this final recompense of the believer, he is absolutely lifted into contempt of all that the unregenerate man prizes; and your minds are probably carried, my brethren, by his language on this occasion, to those other places in his writings, in which the thought of his resurrection makes him ascend, with transport of soul, above every sublunary concern. How does his bosom glow, as he exclaims to the Christians of Corinth; "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality! So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is

written, Death is swallowed up in victory.”* With what rapture does he, on a subsequent occasion, look forward to the hour, when, in the world of light and joy, he should be clothed upon with “a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!”† With what elevation of feeling does he express himself to the Thessalonian believers! “The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”‡

In view of this effect of the doctrine of the resurrection upon St. Paul’s mind, may I not properly present it to *you*, my brethren, as a means, under Providence, of raising you in triumph above the follies, the cares, and the afflictive visitations of life? Is there within this assembly the man of the world; the person who is giving himself up to the pleasures and amusements of the passing hour; and saying to the meagre frivolities which earth offers to him, Ye are my gods? To perceive these objects of your idolatry in their real insignificance, measure them by the glories of eternity. Place all that you have been so long pursuing in comparison with the joys of the risen believer: and be led, through divine grace, to change your course of action; and to look above this land of vain shadows to a state, where the servants of Jesus shall be renewed with celestial beauty, and delivered from the bondage of corruption for ever. Where, in the present congregation, is the believer, who is oppressed by a multiplicity of vexations; and disturbed

* I. Cor. xv. 53. 54.

† II. Cor. v. 1.

‡ I. Thes. iv. 16. 17.

by daily anxieties arising out of the nature of his worldly calling? Soothe these corroding sorrows with that anticipation which was the Apostle's comfort, amidst the heaviest trials of his career. This short, feverish, restless state of existence, will soon be terminated; and, for those who have been washed in the blood of Christ, there then remaineth a rest: a cessation from all that now annoys: a body fitted for unmingled enjoyment in the Lord's beatific presence, and in the rejoicing company of his redeemed people. And do I see those before me, who are mourning over the separations of a world, where they who have travelled longest together must at length be parted? My dear brethren, there is that in the doctrine before us which should dry your tears. That form which has descended into the grave, shall be again quickened into life; that tongue shall again speak; those eyes shall again beam with "meek intelligence;" and it is yours to feel, in all its sweet influences, the language of him who exclaimed, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."* In the contemplation, then, of this coming resurrection to eternal life, find an antidote against the trifles, and against the calamities of the world; and present to yourselves daily the patriarch's anticipation, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."†

The Apostle, having thus expressed his ardent desires after

* I. Thess. iv. 13. 14.

† Job, xix. 25. 26.

the blessings of the gospel, and the effect which these great objects had produced in sinking the world in his esteem, proceeds, in the twelfth verse, to a remark of considerable importance. He there tells the Philippians, that, paramount as were the things of the next world in his mind, and much as he labored after their possession, yet, withal, he could not as yet confidently pronounce them his. Mark the cautious fear and trembling of his language. "Not," he declares, "as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." The terms here employed, are in allusion to runners in the ancient games. The term "perfect" was applied to those who had come off victorious, and to whom was assigned the prize; and it is in reference to this appellation, that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of "the spirits of just men made perfect;"* that is, of those believers who, in the heavenly world, have been crowned with a glorious recompense of reward. St. Paul means to say, therefore, that, inasmuch as he was yet in a world of conflict and temptation, he could do no more than *hope* for the crown of life; and was far from venturing to consider himself, with full assurance, as the possessor of those rich blessings to which he aspired. Instead of certainty, therefore, anxious and incessant labor was his allotment. "But I follow after," that is, I keep ever active in the course to which I am called; "if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus;" in other words, endeavoring, with all diligence, and by every effort, to reach that prize, for the sake of which my gracious Master seized me in my blind career; and, opening my eyes to the sinfulness of the unrenewed heart, and the vanity of the

* Heb. xii. 23.

world, led me as a willing captive to the obedience of his cross.—In these words, as thus briefly explained, one or two considerations, of a very useful character, unfold themselves to your view.

And 1. You perceive, my beloved brethren, *in these timorous expressions of St. Paul, in regard to the momentous subject of his own eternal salvation, the spirit of all the real servants of Christ.*—Let us advert, for a moment, to the precise character and circumstances of the great Apostle of the Gentiles. He had been brought, through the power of divine grace, to a clear and experimental knowledge of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: he had devoted all the faculties of his mind and body to the Redeemer's service: and had now nearly reached the conclusion of his happy, holy, and strikingly useful career. Yet what, amidst all this, is the pervading feeling of his bosom? The words before us sufficiently disclose it. He does not, it is true, despond, nor evince any terrors in regard to the nature of his eternal destiny: for this would have been strange, after a conversion so peculiar in its character, and a life so signally distinguished. But there is here, nevertheless, no expression of bold confidence; nothing indicative of ease and security; not the least degree of that spirit which seems to say—The struggle is over; I have gained the prize; and heaven, with all its fulness of joys and glories, is my assured inheritance. My Christian brethren, may we not take a lesson from the example before us; and learn from it, that they who have advanced to farthest attainments in the school of Christ, are, invariably, the most distinguished by a timid estimate in regard to their safety in the world to come, and a glorious termination of their labors?

The principle, from which this disposition of the Lord's spiritual servants proceeds, is easy of explanation. It is the most experienced believer, who knows best the weakness of his own heart. He feels within himself the daily struggle between the spirit and the flesh: temptations teach him, that "the righteous scarcely are saved:"* and, accordingly, so long as he continues in the body, and is fighting the fight of faith, he cannot permit himself to look, with triumphant certainty, to that "rest" which "remaineth for the people of God."† It may, therefore, be generally taken as a certain truth, that, wherever there are found high pretensions to holiness, and a tone of confidence in respect to the possession of God's kingdom hereafter, there, likewise, shall we discover little knowledge of the deceitfulness of man's nature, and very shallow experience of the divine life within the soul. The believer, like St. Paul, exults in the delightful anticipation of a resurrection unto glory. But his rapture is chastened by fear: he labors after that reward, which he feels conscious that he does not yet possess: and his heart continually cries, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help;"‡ "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe;"§ "O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles."||

2. There is another part of the Apostle's words to which I would invite your attention, and which possesses much interest: namely, *the gratitude with which he recognizes that kind interposition of Providence, whereby he had been brought to a saving knowledge of the truth.* Turn your eyes again to the language he uses: "If that I may appre-

* I. Pet. iv. 18. † Heb. iv. 9. ‡ Ps. cxxi. 1. § Ps. cxix. 117. || Ps. xliii. 3.

hend that for which also *I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.*" His words are an allusion to the idea of some person, who, having wandered from the correct road into a dreary and perilous wilderness, is suddenly arrested by a friendly arm, and restored to the path of safety. In like manner was it with St. Paul himself. He was straying an outcast from his Father's house, and in ignorance of the way of life: but that Lord whose compassions fail not met him on his journey, and conducted him, by the power of his illuminating grace, to the peace and happiness of the gospel. So beneficent an act of the divine Redeemer in his behalf, he takes occasion, in the verse before us, to commemorate; and breaks forth into a passing expression of love for the Being, who had thus gathered him out of the world's howling waste into the fold of his crucified Master.

My brethren, there are some among *you*, who, like the great Apostle, have experienced the efficacy of God's converting Spirit; and does not the example of St. Paul's adoring acknowledgment speak a lesson of thankfulness to yourselves? The truth is, that that visitation of divine Providence by which a sinner is convicted of his transgressions, and humbled into a reception of the Lord Jesus Christ as his only refuge, is so unspeakable a blessing, that it ought never to be absent from the memory. It should be answered with a daily return of praise: it should be the theme of your songs in the night: it should bring you into that frame of soul, which the Apostle describes to the Colossians, when he says, "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated

us into the kingdom of his dear Son.²² Let me ask you, then, my Christian friends, to carry your remembrance to the history of past years; and, whatever has been the precise method in which the Lord has brought you to the knowledge of himself, to make it the subject of your devoutest ascriptions to the Author of your mercies. Was it in the midst of profligacy and vice, that the kind Shepherd touched you with his hand? Adore the mercy, which, notwithstanding a career so calculated to harden the heart, and prevent the entrance of every serious impression, led you to reflection; and opened your eyes to the misery of him, who is living without Christ and without hope in the world. Did the Lord God Almighty visit you with this divine renewal of the affections, while immersed in the pleasures of the worldly? Acknowledge, in this case, the arm that took you into the path of life; and, for delights which pass quickly away, and leave a sting behind, gave you that faith which sees a Saviour at hand, and that peace which passeth all understanding. Or do you find yourself unable to point to any particular moment, in your pilgrimage of life, in which the transforming grace of the Redeemer operated upon your heart; but rather trace back through long years a course of faith and love, which kept ever increasing in strength and brightness as your days advanced? Oh, forget not to pay your tribute to Him, who, through this path of pious education, has made you his spiritual servant; give him the honor that is due; "praise the Lord while you live," and, as long as you "have any being, sing praises unto your God."[†] My dear hearers, if there be any thing glorious in the happiness of heaven, or awful in the condemnation of

* Col. i. 12. 13.

† Ps. cxlvi. 2.

hell, thus thank the Author of your conversion to the knowledge of the truth ; and turn upward an eye of humble adoration to that Lord, " who hath blessed you with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."*

The verses with which the portion before us concludes, are but a repetition, in another form, of the declaration made by the Apostle, in that by which they are preceded. " Brethren," he exclaims, as if enforcing what he had said, " I count not myself to have apprehended ;" that is, I do not consider myself as having, like the successful runner, already reached my reward : " but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus : " in other words, Instead of resting with satisfaction upon my past attainments in faith, and supposing the crown to be mine, I bear in mind that life is a continual struggle ; I watch and strive ; I tremble, lest, after all that I have done, I should at last make shipwreck of my hopes, and be a castaway from the Father's love.—It is in these strong and decided terms, that the Apostle repeats his anxiety for the result : but his words, while they express this cautious diffidence, set forth to you, my brethren, in a manner the most forcible and impressive, *the activity, zeal, and devotedness, which distinguish those, who are truly advancing to a heavenly country, and contending for the eternal salvation of the gospel.* In the view of that altar,† around which you are about to proclaim, before men and angels, that the world is a shadow, and Christ is all in your esteem, permit me to hold up the spirit of St. Paul as the mind that should

* Eph. i. 3.

† Communion Sunday.

likewise be in you. How can you, in the prospect of that feast of your profession, be content to proceed in a poor career of compromise with the vanities of the world, and of lukewarm and partial service? The calling of the believer is one of untiring energy, not of formal observances; of spirit and of power, not of cold and reluctant ceremony. To such a view of its character, may each one of you, through the grace of God, be led this day with clear perception! Call to mind the infinite preciousness of your reward. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."* Ponder the disastrous consequences of your failure. "The smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever."† "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"‡ "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."§

* Rev. ii. 7. † Rev. xiv. 11. ‡ Isaiah, xxxiii. 14. § II. Pet. i. 10. 11.

LECTURE XIV.

CHAPTER III. 15—19.

Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded : and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ : Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

THE Apostle, after having dwelt, through nearly all the preceding part of the present Chapter, upon the subject of himself and his spiritual views, now returns to his Philippian brethren ; and addresses to them several exhortations, founded upon the important statements which he had just been making. The Epistle in whose elucidation we are employed, is, properly speaking, a letter of practical admonitions. It leads the believer to the proper sources of confidence ; it enjoins upon him the importance of a right judgment, in the momentous concerns

of the gospel ; and proposes salutary rules for the government of his daily life and conduct. The portion which now comes in order for your consideration, accords entirely with this character of the composition ; and furnishes some precepts, upon which we may profitably, in dependence upon the divine blessing, bestow our thoughts.

The Apostle begins with exhorting the Philippians to cultivate the same views, in regard to the gospel, which he had just illustrated in the description of his own experience. "Let us therefore," he observes, "as many as be perfect, be thus minded : and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you." In advising his brethren of Philippi to be "thus minded," he refers to all that he had been maintaining in the previous verses of the Chapter. He had shewn it to be the duty, and the characteristic spirit of the real Christian, to renounce all dependence upon the deeds of the flesh ; to rest upon the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation ; to count every thing as worthless, in comparison with the eternal blessings of the gospel ; and, in the pursuit of his heavenly reward, to be continually struggling onward, as one that dreads to lose the crown, and that feels the necessity of hourly vigilance and exertion. This habit of mind and feeling, as exemplified in his own Christian course, the Apostle now urges upon all those who had attained experience in the things of God ; and whom he here distinguishes by the honorable title of the "perfect." By this expression, he understands persons, who have arrived at mature acquaintance with the gospel system ; who are advanced and spiritual believers, as distinguished from those who have but an imperfect knowledge of the scheme of salvation. The possessors of this enlightened religion he characterizes, in other places, by various names. In

his First Epistle to the Corinthians he calls them "spiritual" persons, in opposition to those who, by their feeble progress in divine things, are only "carnal," and "babes in Christ."* And, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, they are styled those "that are of full age," in distinction from others, who, though nominally Christians, "have need that one teach them again which be the first principles of the oracles of God."† The sacred writer implies, therefore, in the words before us, that it ought reasonably to be expected of persons who had been, in a good measure, enlightened by the Spirit of God, that they should exhibit those correct views of truth on which he had recently been insisting; and he connects with this remark another observation, of a very encouraging nature. "And if in any thing," says he, "ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you:" that is—Should it unhappily be the fact, that some among you entertain defective conceptions, and different from my own, in regard to any of the doctrines of the gospel, let me exhort you to go steadily and humbly onward; and, through this path of prayer and godly sincerity, you will be conducted at last to the full day-light of Christian truth.

It is to this part of the verse now under consideration, that I would, in particular, my brethren, invite your attention; because it illustrates a very interesting feature in the Apostle's character. Examine the spirit that breathes through his language. Among the professing Christians of Philippi, there were some who labored under very imperfect and confused notions, as to the method of the sinner's justification. In respect to these partially informed believers, what is the disposition

* I. Cor. iii. 1.

† Heb. v. 12. 14.

manifested by the great Apostle? Is he irritated, that, with Christ plainly preached, and with the word of God open for their instruction, they should remain in such ignorance of that way of life provided by heaven for a ruined world? Does he upbraid them? Does he express himself even with the least degree of harsh and inimical feeling? In distinction from all this, mark his temper. He is thankful for that measure of knowledge which these Christians have already attained; and waits, in a spirit of calm forbearance and faith, for the time, when that Lord who has led them thus far shall give them more abundant infusions of his grace, and conduct them "unto a perfect man."* Thus it is that St. Paul deals with his less enlightened brethren; and his conduct cannot be too strongly impressed upon those of you, my Christian friends, who have been favored by Providence with a discriminating knowledge of divine things. While you mingle among the professed servants of Christ, you meet with constant exemplifications of that deficient acquaintance with the gospel, which was perceived by the Apostle in those primitive days. You find it, for instance, to be a possible thing, that men may have sat for a considerable period under the faithful ministration of the word of life, and yet, after all, have no clear convictions of the exclusive efficacy of Christ, for procuring their eternal salvation: that they may be blind to the extent of their inward corruption; and be resting, with a certain easy security, upon a life of moral virtues, and of benevolent deeds. Again; among those who make a public profession of the religion of Christ, you discover persons, who, though not without some strong feelings of gratitude and love for the Redeemer of sinners, have

* Eph. iv. 13.

not yet been crucified by them to the world ; and have not the most distant perception of the necessity of coming out from among the ranks of the frivolous, being "separate,"* and renouncing the customs and pleasures of the unconverted mind. Now, at the sight of avowed servants of Christ, thus deficient in their views of truth, the experienced believer is immediately tempted to express himself in censures and reproaches. He compares the prevailing errors around him with the true standard of Scripture ; and finds it hard to think, with composure, upon opinions so dark and uncertain in regard to the religion of the Son of God, among those who are called his disciples upon earth. Some of those who now hear me have probably experienced the feeling to which I refer ; and to such, the language of St. Paul under review exhibits, in contrast, the spirit which should characterize the children of God. The believer, instead of being uneasy at the deficiencies of professed Christians, should rather live in the exercise of humble prayer, and of patient expectation. Let those who are most taught of God look back to the gradual advances, by which they reached their present illuminated state : let them think of the inadequacy of their own former views : and be thus led to hope for brighter apprehensions, in regard to their yet half-instructed brethren in the Lord. So far from being dissatisfied because all is not perfect, be grateful that so much has been accomplished ; and trust that the same almighty Providence will, in due season, communicate still larger supplies of that heavenly Spirit, which guideth "into all truth."† Despise not "the day of small things ;"‡ think that what you see not now, you shall see hereafter ; and strive after the possession of that love,

* II. Cor. vi. 17.

† John, xvi. 13.

‡ Zech. iv. 10.

which "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."*

The *next* admonition here given by the Apostle, enjoins upon Christians the importance of persevering with constancy, in the maintenance of those spiritual graces and privileges which they already possess. He thus expresses his exhortation. "Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing:" or, in other words—Though your progress in the divine life, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, may have been as yet but small, continue, by dependence upon the grace of God, in the career which you have begun; and beware, lest, after having "escaped the pollutions of the world," you be "again entangled therein, and overcome."†

It would be impossible, my brethren, too much to admire the wisdom of the Apostle, in addressing a precept such as this *to the young in faith and holiness*. He had just been expressing, as you have seen, his favorable hopes as to the future improvement of those, who were as yet imperfectly acquainted with the gospel. But bearing in mind, at the same time, the perilous temptations that beset the Christian traveller, he immediately proceeds to caution them; and to urge their adherence to that way of peace and salvation, upon which they had so happily entered. The experience of some before me will be able to testify to the necessity of the admonition; and will acknowledge it to be a truth, that, if there be any among the disciples of Christ who stand in need of all which precept, and exhortation, and warm entreaty can effect, in preserving them steadfast in their "first love,"‡ it is those who have just com-

* I. Cor. xiii. 7.

† II. Pet. ii. 20.

‡ Rev. ii. 4.

menced their course of "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."* With such persons, most of all, the pilgrimage to heaven is a difficult and trying career. He who has made but feeble advances in the love of Christ, is proportionately weak in his ability to rise superior to the assaults of the world; things seen have a more attractive appearance in his eye; and, not being influenced by a counteracting principle sufficiently strong and steady, he is liable to be carried off by the gaudy pageantry of life, or to be withdrawn from the singleness of his pursuit after heaven. This, then, is one of the dangers that encompass the inexperienced servants of God; and we may mention, in addition, their discouragement of heart, by the discovery of their repeated falls beneath the power of temptation. Overcome by the grand enemy, relapsing from the warmth of their affections, and led into sinful compliances, they are ready to give up the contest; and, with a species of desperation, conclude, that it is not to be their privilege to be faithful unto death, and to receive the crown of life everlasting. Amidst these combined perils of the young soldier of Christ, the voice of the Apostle here speaks to him its animating and seasonable language. He bids you, my believing friends, in the exercise of faith, patience, and ardent supplication, hold fast your profession without wavering. He counsels you, by all the inestimable glories of salvation, to yield neither to the blandishments of the world, nor to the suggestions of wicked despondency. He comes to you as to persons, that know the blessedness and value of Christ's service, and all the loss that you will incur by your desertion; and then affectionately exclaims, "Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come,

* I. John, i. 3.

and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith : but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition ; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”*

From this exhortation to the weak in faith, the Apostle passes on to give a general admonition to believers of every description ; and humbly presents to them the duty of taking himself, as the model of their daily walk and conversation in the world. “Brethren,” he exclaims, “be followers together of me ; and mark,” or observe, “them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample :” or, to express his meaning in other language ; Copy into your own lives those graces and qualifications, which, through the sanctifying Spirit of God, I am enabled to exhibit ; and, wherever those are to be found who are endeavoring to fashion their course by my example, make them the objects of your study and imitation.—These words are highly important, because they inculcate a truth which is declared, with equal plainness, in other portions of the word of life ; namely, *that the believer may very properly propose to himself, as patterns, the faithful servants of Christ ; and endeavor to be like them, so far as their characters bear a resemblance to that heavenly Master, whom both he and they serve.* Thus, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul commands them, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.”† In conformity with this precept, he counsels the believing Hebrews to be “followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”‡ And it is in the same manner that the Psalmist expresses himself ; “Mark the per-

* Heb. x. 37. 38. 39. † I. Cor. xi. 1. ‡ Heb. vi. 12.

fect man, and behold the upright : for the end of that man is peace."^{*}

There can certainly be no privilege, my Christian brethren, for which our gratitude is more justly due unto the Father of mercies, than that of being furnished, in the lives and actions of God's real servants, with animating examples of every heavenly virtue. It is by these holy and self-denying followers of the Lord, that we are impelled forward on our way ; we catch their spirit ; we dwell with delight upon the several portions of their blessed career ; and go forth, with new vigor, resolving like them to live, and also like them to die. Perhaps the best method of proving the efficacy of these models of the divine life, will be to refer you to your own experience, in past days, of their influence upon your hearts. Where have you found the Scripture to speak with greater interest and power, than in its histories of those who here walked in communion with God, followed the leadings of his providence, and cast themselves, as believing sinners, upon the merits of his only-begotten Son ? I may remind you, also, of the profit which you have, at various times, derived, from the perusal of Christian biography. You have risen with new determinations to forsake all for Jesus, from the pages that record the lives of Gardiner, and Newton, and Scott, and Martyn, and Urquhart, and Richmond ; and have felt after them an increased and increasing devotion to that everlasting gospel, which was the grand theme of their rejoicing. And it is with the same happy results, that the Christian contemplates those who, in his own day, live before his eyes as signal illustrations of the loveliness and glory of reli-

* Ps. xxxvii. 37.

gion. We have such in our own land ; we behold them on the other side of the ocean ; and their example is fraught with quickening virtue, and speeds us onward to heaven with fresh alacrity and joy. You may discern, therefore, by an examination of your own feelings, the propriety of the Apostle's admonition in the language before us. Conscious, though with all lowliness of spirit, of his own attainments in the life of God, he holds forth the pattern for the diligent inspection of his absent children. He bids them ponder that love to Christ, that self-renouncing mind, that zeal, that anxiety for the souls of men, which distinguished his course to the world of glory. He points their attention to all, whoever they might be, who pursued a similar path in the midst of them ; he exhorts them to make these the exemplars, under Providence, of their own spiritual career ; and to the believers of Philippi, and to you, my brethren, after them, exclaims, "Go, and do thou likewise."^{*}

Such is the manner in which St. Paul proposes himself, and all holy men, as patterns to the Philippian believers : but he now proceeds to the painful, though equally needful duty, of warning them against the opposite examples of false professors of Christ. This caution is contained in the eighteenth and nineteenth verses ; and evidently has reference to those carnally minded persons, who were then disturbing the church of Philippi with their false doctrines, and corrupting it by their worldly lives. These dangerous men have already been referred to, in former portions of the Epistle : but let us see the terms in which they are now described. "For many walk," he declares, "of whom I have told you often," namely,

^{*} Luke, x. 37.

during my presence with you in other days, "and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ." The individuals to whom St. Paul refers were distinguished, as we have seen, by their neglect of the grand doctrine of justification, through the merits of the Redeemer of sinners, and by their attempts to establish acceptance through the Mosaic rituals: they might, therefore, with the utmost propriety, be styled opposers of their gracious Master, within the very bosom of his church below. He goes on to depict them in still stronger language. "Whose end is destruction;" in other words, who, notwithstanding all their pretensions here, are travelling on the direct road to the final "perdition of ungodly men."* "Whose God is their belly;" that is, the great object which they have in view, in their daily life, is to gratify their appetite, and obtain the luxuries and comforts of the present world. "Whose glory is in their shame;" by which he means to say, that they pursued without compunction a course, which disgraced their Christian vocation. "Who mind earthly things", is the concluding representation of their character; by which it is shewn, that, amidst an outward religious profession, their affections, feelings, hopes, and views, were all limited to this transitory scene; and never ascended to those things "where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God."†

It appears, then, from the description which has now passed in review, that these persons of whom St. Paul writes were at once corrupt in doctrine, and unchanged in heart and life; and that, though not, perhaps, stained with any scandalous vices, yet they exhibited the reverse of that spiritual and

* II. Pet. iii. 7.

† Col. iii. 1.

heavenly mind, which distinguishes the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. But, my brethren, the precise conduct and spirit of those primitive deceivers is, to us, a matter of small importance, compared with that practical lesson which may be gathered from the words of the Apostle, as they have just been briefly explained. This useful inference let us now draw for our instruction. You perceive the solicitude with which St. Paul counsels his Philippian brethren, in regard to those among them who were unworthy of imitation. During the period of his personal ministry in the midst of them, he had lifted up his voice on repeated occasions ; he now charges them again on the same subject ; and with tears and prayers entreats the children of God, to be on their guard against those evil examples, by which their journey to heaven was endangered. What, then, let me ask, does all this anxiety of the Apostle speak, but the important truth, that *the Christian cannot be too constantly alive to the peril in which he stands, from erroneous and worldly professors of the religion of Christ Jesus ?* It might have been supposed, that, with the views which these Philippians had received from the mouth of St. Paul, and with his bright example before their eyes, they would be in no danger from those who, with an opposite character, were around them in their daily journey to the skies. The Apostle, however, knew better the contagious nature of false doctrine, and of earthly lives ; and, in the words which he here utters, he desires affectionately to remind you, my Christian brethren, of the perils that encompass you, while in a world where there is so much of the profession of Christ, with so little of the spirit and power of his religion.

The dangers of the spiritual believer arise principally from

the circumstance, that errors so fatal in their consequences are nevertheless so plausible in their outward appearance. Allow me to illustrate this observation, by reference to one or two plain examples. Among the number of those who belong to the church of the Redeemer on earth, are some, whose whole course is that of merely formal compliance, decency, and moral correctness ; but whose minds have no perception of that way of life eternal, which God has appointed through the merits of his dear Son. And yet, to the eye, these very persons are actually the servants of Christ ; and, of course, the danger of their views is tenfold greater to the believer, from the fair covering in which their real character is enveloped, and from their apparent resemblance to the children of God. Again : in this same church of the Redeemer, are those who, though members of Christ's visible body, and numbered among his true servants, have never abandoned the service of the world ; and are combining with a profession of godliness, a daily conformity to the practices and principles of " them that are without."* Here, then, is another peril for the friends and disciples of Jesus. An open enemy they can shun : but the persons who thus live and act, are they who are joined with them in the same spiritual society ; who kneel with them at the same table ; who profess to be under the guidance of the same illuminating Spirit, and to be expecting the same city above. Amidst these dangers which attend the follower of the Lord, what is the course of wisdom and of safety ? Let him study, with diligence and prayer, the volume of God's holy word ; and by this infallible standard let him judge of the principles and the habits of those, who are enrolled under the banners of the Re-

* Col. iv. 5.

deemer. Do the professed disciples of the Son of God agree with the model here presented? Let him take them as salutary guides for his own faith and practice. Do they differ from that heavenly book? Let him set his face against their conduct and their views; and dread them as false and pernicious members of the flock of Christ. With this spirit of humble fear, and cautious examination, let me counsel you, my Christian friends, to proceed. Weigh well the character of that religion, which is so prevalent in the world around you. There are many "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away."*

* II. Tim. iii. 5.

LECTURE XV.

CHAPTER III. 20. 21. IV. 1—3.

For our conversation is in heaven ; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ ; Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved. I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. And I entreat thee also, true yoke-fellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellow-labourers, whose names are in the book of life.

FROM that description of the earthly-minded teachers of his day, which the Apostle had just drawn for the benefit of the Philippian believers, he now turns to the contrasted character of the real disciples of Christ. The religion of the Lord Jesus, as exemplified in the spiritual affections and lives of its true subjects, is, in itself, lovely to behold; but it must be admitted, that, when illustrated by comparison with the sordid views, the sensual desires, and the utterly grovelling attachments, of

unconverted men, it shines forth with still brighter radiance to our eyes. How forcibly, therefore, does St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Galatians, exhibit those graces which he terms "the fruit of the Spirit," by placing them at the side of those evil passions which he calls "the works of the flesh!"* How elevated appears the Christian's pursuit after "righteousness," as the supreme object of his heart's desires, when, in the First Epistle to Timothy, it is spoken of immediately after that "love of money,"† which is the base appetite of the worldling, and his absorbing aim from childhood to the grave! It is for this same reason, that the portrait of a true believer, contained in the commencement of the portion now to be considered, comes before us with additional beauty: because it follows a representation of covetousness, of unchanged affections, of service to the creature, and not to "the Creator, who is blessed for ever."‡

In distinction from those whom he had been describing, and whose hearts the Holy Spirit had never purified from the love of the world, the Apostle thus defines the character of the renewed servant of Christ. "For our conversation is in heaven." The word which is here rendered "conversation," signifies properly, citizenship, and the feelings and views connected with it. St. Paul, therefore, intends to say, that he, and all those who were partakers of the "like precious faith," were no longer denizens of earth, but of that higher state which is above; and that, in conformity with privileges and hopes so exalted, their minds rose above this transitory scene, and were fixed upon the glories of the world to come. Let me invite your attention to the solemn and interesting state-

* Gal. v. 19—23.

† I. Tim. vi. 10. 11.

‡ Rom. i. 25.

ment, contained in these words of inspiration. Whosoever, in the present congregation, has been led by divine [grace to receive Christ within him, as "the hope of glory," is now, through the merits of the Saviour's atonement, exalted to the dignity and happiness of being a member of the heavenly world. He is no longer a person belonging to the earth merely ; but is already, by anticipation, one of the inhabitants of that blessed region, where the spirits of the just made perfect rejoice in their Redeemer's presence. It is in regard to this connexion of the Christian with those happy spirits above, that St. Paul elsewhere describes him as being a "fellow-citizen with the saints, and of the household of God :"^{*} and, on another occasion, he represents him as having "come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant."[†] Thus united in holy fellowship with that abode of the redeemed, the effect upon the heart and life of the believer is such as might reasonably be expected to appear. He moves through the present scene, as one whose vision is lifted to another that is beyond it ; there he lives ; and, amidst the sundry and manifold temptations of the world, steadfastly "seeks those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God."[‡] If you cast your eyes, my brethren, over the pages of Scripture, you will find that this heavenly mind has always characterized, in a visible manner, the true servants of the Lord. Enoch, while all else were immersed in sublunary concerns, walked in communion with God, and with that better world where he resides.§ Abraham "sojourned in the land

^{*} Eph. ii. 19.[†] Heb. xii. 22, 24.[‡] Col. iii. 1.[§] Gen. v. 24.

of promise, as in a strange country : for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.* David, amidst the illusions of life, kept his views fixed upon that presence where there "is fulness of joy," and that right hand where "there are pleasures for evermore.†" In such a habit of mind, if you are the renewed disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, you likewise will ever be found. Citizens of an eternal country, thither your thoughts will continually ascend ; you will be like pilgrims, who, though compelled to pass through the road of this lower world, are thinking, all the time, of their home ; you will shew plainly, by your whole course of conduct, that your spirit is, "Here have we no continuing city, but we see one to come."‡

Having thus contrasted with the character of worldly men that of the spiritual children of God, St. Paul proceeds, in the *next* place, to state one reason, in particular, for which the heavenly world possesses such interest in the Christian's eye. It is thus expressed. "From whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ ; Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." He here affirms, therefore, as you perceive, that the Christian pilgrim cannot but have his affections fixed upon that other, and better country, because the thought of it is connected with the expectation of Him, who, at the last day, shall raise our dust from the grave, and fit it for the everlasting enjoyments of his heavenly kingdom. Let us examine the words before us more minutely. St. Paul places in contrast two different objects. The one of these is "our vile body,"

* Heb. xi. 9. 10.

† Ps. xvi. 11.

‡ Heb. xiii. 14.

more literally expressed, the body of our human nature is, a body degraded from its original condition by the entrance of sin into the world ; liable to diseases and destined at last to die, descend into the earth, and become the prey of corruption. The other is the "glorious body" of the Lord Jesus Christ ; that, namely, in which he now sits, as Mediator of the church, at the right hand of the throne of God. The lowly and corruptible body of the believer, thus strikingly compared with that of his risen and glorified Master, the Apostle tells us shall be "changed : " by which he intends to say, not that the servants of Christ shall, at the resurrection, appear with a different form and resemblance from that which they before possessed ; but that, according to the proper signification of the word, they shall be fashioned anew ; and, having qualities and properties imparted to them, in virtue of which they shall be incorruptible and immortal, shall thus be conformed to the likeness of their divine Head. Now all this wonderful operation, whereby the decayed tenement of flesh is raised from the ground, restored to communion with the spirit by which it was once inhabited, and made forever incapable of "diseases and decline," seems, to the finite conceptions of man, something beyond the bounds of credibility. We are here directed, therefore, to the Author of so mighty an act ; and informed that it is "according to the working," or, the efficacious energy, whereby Christ Jesus "is able even to subdue all things unto himself : " in other words, that same omnipotence of his, through which he shall reduce every opposing enemy to subjection, shall quicken the slumbering dead ; and thus gain the last triumphant victory over the power of the grave.

I may call your attention, my brethren, in passing, to the remarkable testimony afforded, in the passage before us, to the divinity of the eternal Saviour of lost sinners. The Apostle, as you perceive, ascribes the new and glorified bodies of the saints to the almighty strength of the Lord Jesus Christ ; and evidently allows to him the fulness of that might, which “laid the foundations of the earth,” and “shut up the sea with doors, and said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further : and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.”* From this incidental observation, however, I hasten to lead you to the general idea, thrown out in these words of the inspired writer, as they have now been explained.

In a recent Lecture, you were called to view the Apostle looking forward, with enraptured anticipation, to the glorious resurrection of his body. With the same feelings of delight which he then discovered in the topic, he now turns to it once more ; and asserts that the great charm which that brighter and better world possessed for him, was derived from the certainty that his poor, frail, dying flesh, should, by a voice from thence, be clothed with immortal beauty, and dwell with Christ for ever and ever. And is it any wonder, that he who, for the gospel's sake, was “beaten,” and “stoned,” and “buffeted,” should find some joy in the expectation of a state, which shall not be subject, through eternal years, to the visitations of sorrow and of pain ? Is it any wonder, that he who had been worn with “hunger,” and parched with “thirst,” should dwell with transport upon the promises of a frame, which “shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more ; for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead

* Job, xxxviii. 4. 8. 11.

them unto living fountains of waters ?”* Is it surprising, that he who, for the work of bringing sinners unto God, had pined in “weariness” and “watchings,” and “had no certain dwelling-place,” should hail with delight a condition, in which, as long as heaven itself shall endure, the believer shall sweetly “rest from his labors ?”† But that which the Apostle uttered for his own consolation, he likewise spoke, my brethren, for yours. If you are true Christians,—he seems to say,—you are citizens of God’s kingdom in heaven ; thither exalt your views ; and, to lend new interest to your contemplation of it, behold, in imagination, the gracious Redeemer descending thence, to invest you, according to the promises of his word, with a new and better tabernacle. “It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption : it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory : it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.” “As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” “O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ?” “Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ !”‡

The reference thus made by the Apostle to the animating doctrine of the resurrection of the body, affords him good ground for urging upon the Philippians, with earnestness and affection, the duty of *perseverance in the love of Christ*. This admonition forms the commencing verse of the Fourth Chapter ; and is thus feelingly expressed. “Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved :” that is to say ; If it is to such a recompense that the gospel of Jesus permits you to aspire, labor, through divine grace, to be preserved firm in

* Rev. vii. 16. 17. † Rev. xiv. 13. ‡ I. Cor. xv. 42. 43. 49. 55. 57.

your attachment to that way of eternal salvation, to which you have thus far adhered with faith and love. I might apply to yourselves, my Christian brethren, the exhortation here given by St. Paul to his children at Philippi; and might ask you how it can be possible, that, with such motives to take God for your exclusive portion, and to renounce every inferior object, any of you should still be divided, in base neutrality, between Christ and the world; be so little alive to the superior blessedness and importance of the believer's privileges; and not rather labor, with single eye, after the attainment of those precious promises, which the religion of Jesus discloses? Permit me, however, to direct you principally to one idea, which is unfolded in the words before us; that of the tenderness with which the faithful ministers of Christ contemplate those, among whom, by the appointment of a gracious Providence, they are placed as spiritual shepherds and guides.

Turn your eye once more to the expressions of St. Paul. He styles the Philippians his "joy:" intimating, that to see them walking by faith in an unseen Saviour; denying themselves; resisting the temptations of a vain world; taking up their cross; and following Jesus; was the great source of his happiness, while journeying through this present state to the kingdom of heaven. The feelings of the Apostle, my brethren, represent those which animate the heart of every ministering servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is filled with the spirit of his office. The pleasure of beholding the increase of real religion, in the midst of that people for whom he labors in the gospel, renders every earthly source of gratification worthless in his esteem: as, on the other hand, to be deprived of this satisfaction, and find the power of Christianity declin-

ing ; pride, frivolity, and worldly-mindedness gaining the ascendancy ; and " the love of many waxing cold ; " * casts a gloom over his happiest hours, and makes him, through the succession of months and years, ' slight the season and the scene.' But St. Paul also gives to these believers of Philippi the name of his " crown : " evidently meaning to express the gladness with which he looked forward to the hour, when his faithful people should, at the judgment-seat of Christ, stand forth as the evidences of his labors ; and as proofs that he was worthy, through Christ, of that blessed recompense, which the Lord shall assign to his diligent servants. In this feeling, likewise, the ambassadors of salvation to a guilty world largely participate ; and I may here very properly pause, for a moment, to offer a passing tribute to that infinite mercy, which has thus provided, for the minister of Christ, an effectual barrier against the allurements of the world, and an abiding comfort amidst its reproaches and its frowns. What power have the empty pleasures, and the seducing honors of this life, for that herald of the Lord Jesus, who beholds the objects of his labors increasing in the knowledge of Christ, and proceeding onward to a kingdom in the skies ; and who anticipates, through his Master's acceptance of these signs of his faithfulness, an everlasting enjoyment of the Saviour's presence ? And let us view the minister of truth, amidst the persecutions and trials of his career. By some his exhibitions of gospel doctrine and precepts are contemptuously reviled ; others turn with indifference from his message ; and, in this way, the larger portion of those to whom his efforts are directed yield no fruit to gladden him in return. But, under

* Matt. xxiv. 12.

these necessary endurances of his vocation, he can still lift up his head with transport. While the malignant oppose, and the lukewarm are unimpressed, the gracious Head of the church vouchsafes to him some spiritual children. In these he rejoices with joy unspeakable: he regards them as more than a counterbalance for all his tribulations: and hails their Christian graces as the pledge of his own future participation in the promise, "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."* Such is the privilege of God's ministering servants. They turn an eye of rapture to the people of their love and their care; and, as they behold them, utter the exclamation, "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy."†

St. Paul adds, in the next verse, *another* admonition, founded upon the same animating prospect of a future resurrection to glory. "I beseech," says he, "Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord." He here addresses an exhortation to two women of Philippi; who, from the account given of them in the following verse, appear to have been distinguished for their assiduous exertions in the cause of Christ Jesus. Nothing farther is related concerning them, in the pages of the New Testament history; but, from the advice given them, in the language before us, to cultivate a spirit of Christian unanimity, it seems that, from some cause or other which has not reached our ears, an unhappy disagreement between them had arisen. In view of those glorious prospects to which he had just invited their

* Dan. xii. 3.

† I. Thess. ii. 19. 20.

attention, St. Paul urges them to mutual forbearance, and to a speedy accommodation of their difficulties ; representing, as it were, the inconsistency of the circumstance, that two persons who expected to rise, by the same omnipotent word, from the grave, and be conducted with new bodies to the same mansion in heaven, should here be separated in feeling by any petty ground of contention. The inspired Apostle of the Gentiles here appears, therefore, in the amiable and attractive character of a "peace-maker ;"* but it is not so much to himself personally, as to the subject of his affectionate counsel, that I would briefly call your meditations. Is it not with peculiar force, my brethren, that he sets forth the duty of *a charitable and kindly feeling, between those who are professors of the benignant religion of Jesus Christ*. It not unfrequently happens, in the daily intercourse of the world, that some trifling occurrence excites, within the heart of a believer, an unpleasant sensation towards a Christian brother ; and he is apt to cherish, ever afterwards, a secret feeling of dislike for his person. You can all bear witness, also, that you are the subjects of prepossessions against particular individuals, who bear the name of Christ ; and that you permit any defect or error in the conduct of certain disciples of the Redeemer, to create within you a deep antipathy through life. Now, if the religion of the gospel be one of peace, and gentleness, and love—if the present advice of the Apostle be an infallible rule of conduct—if all the doctrines, and all the precepts, and all the expected privileges, unfolded in the word of truth, militate, with one accord, against a temper such as this ; does it not become the servants of God to put

* Matt. v. 9.

away from them, by the grace of Christ, every remnant of it from their hearts? The spirit of which you have been possessed is from beneath, and not from above; it is one of the fruits of the unconverted man; it confounds you, in appearance, with those who, in the world around, are still "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them."* "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."†

Having thus exhorted these women of Philippi to a sincere and lasting reconciliation, St. Paul passes to *another* admonition in the verse which immediately follows. "And I entreat thee also, true yoke-fellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellow-labourers, whose names are in the book of life." To what person he referred, in the term "yoke-fellow" which is here used, we have no certain information. By some it has been supposed, that he meant the husband of one of these two persons whom he is directed to assist in their useful exertions; others think him to have been some distinguished minister of Christ, whose character, and past services, superseded the necessity of his being more particularly mentioned. However this may be, the Apostle counsels him to use his best efforts in bringing Euodias and Syntyche to a settlement of their differences; and also to encourage them in their excellent labors for the diffusion of the knowledge of Christ.

It appears, from the testimony of St. Paul in the place

* Eph. iv. 18.

† Col. iii. 12. 13.

before us, that these two women had been remarkable for their activity in the cause of the Redeemer ; and that, in the face of persecution and danger, they had strengthened the hands, and assisted the efforts, of those ministering servants of Jesus, who had preached the gospel at Philippi. As women of such a character, and such a spirit, they stand forth, my brethren, on the pages of the word of God, bright and shining examples of *female devotion to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ*. If there be any sphere in which woman shines with true lustre, it is when her heart, touched by the grace of God, impels her to consecrate her time, her talents, and her resources, to the service of her once crucified and now risen Master. To all in this assembly, then, to whom the subject applies, permit me to hold forth the model here presented ; and to urge upon you, as Christians, the duty of acting as these primitive disciples acted in a similar situation. You are enjoying the ministrations of the sanctuary of God. For us, then, who here preach to you the unsearchable riches of Christ, and lead you to happiness and heaven, pray in the secrecy of your retirement ; and, while you remember the difficulties of our warfare, entreat that the Holy Spirit from on high would awaken the careless, humble the proud, undeceive the worldly, and enlarge the blessed dominion of the Prince of peace. You fill a station in your families, by God's appointment. Seek, then, to fulfil its duties : strive that there the Father may be revered ; the Redeemer of sinners loved and honored ; and the will of the Lord done on earth, even as it is done in heaven. You are cast by divine Providence into the midst of a world, abounding in spiritual ignorance, and in temporal woe. Strive to alleviate its misery : " visit the fatherless and widows in

their affliction :”* and, according to the measure of those means with which God has blessed you, help forward the extension of the Saviour’s gospel to the uttermost corners of the earth. Such is the course, by which you may follow in the steps of those excellent servants of the Lord, whose Christian virtues are here so gratefully commemorated. It is your proper and legitimate career. Blessed are those among you, who are found so doing : and it shall be yours one day to realize, in all its glory, that promise of your Lord ; “ Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”†

* James, i. 27.

† Luke, x. 42.

LECTURE XVI.

CHAPTER IV. 4-9.

Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

THERE is something quite affecting in the several parting admonitions, given by St. Paul in this concluding Chapter of his Epistle. He writes to his absent friends precisely like a person, who is uttering what he thinks may probably be his last advice; and who therefore deems it necessary to express himself, with decision and with feeling, upon those subjects which are of highest importance. He was, at this time, in a situa-

tion, which rendered his long continuance in life altogether uncertain : though, as we have seen in a former part of the present course of Lectures, he entertained a reasonable persuasion of deliverance from his sufferings and dangers.* Impressed by the solemn consideration, that he might never be favored with another opportunity of addressing the Philippians, on the things which concerned their salvation, he transmits to them some precepts of great value. These lessons of Christian wisdom let us now consider for our instruction.

Upon the *first* admonition here given by the Apostle, it will not be necessary to dwell. It is thus expressed : " Rejoice in the Lord always : and again I say, Rejoice." He intends, in these words, to enjoin that duty of looking to Christ alone for salvation, and of finding, in his precious sacrifice, an alleviation for all the sorrows of life, which he had enforced in former parts of the Epistle. This topic was fully considered, in the illustration of the commencing verses of the Third Chapter ; and St. Paul now repeats the exhortation as if for the purpose of expressing, again and again, the impropriety of any other than a contented and cheerful spirit, while united to a Saviour so sufficient and divine.—I pass on, therefore, to

The *second* exhortation, addressed by the Apostle to his believing brethren. It inculcates *a chastised and sober enjoyment of the blessings of the present life*. " Let your moderation," he says, " be known unto all men." The word rendered " moderation," denotes here, among other things, that well-balanced and equable mind, which is not carried away by excessive attachment for temporal things ; but, seeing their worthlessness and brevity, and raised to the supreme love of

* See Lecture V.

Christ and heaven, looks upon the objects of this lower world with holy indifference. Considered in this view, the advice of the Apostle corresponds with that which he has given to the Corinthians, that "they that buy" should be "as though they possessed not ;"* with his precept to the Christians of Colosse, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth ;"† and also with that spiritual injunction delivered by St. John, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world."‡ You perceive, also, that St. Paul declares a very beneficial result, which will spring from the exhibition of this heavenly mind by the disciples of Christ. He exhorts them to "let it be known unto all men ;" implying in these words, that those, in the surrounding community, who have not yet embraced the gospel, when they behold the Christian possessing, with a sober and tempered affection, the blessings of a gracious Providence, are led to believe in the divine power of a religion, which can thus crucify the world to him, and him unto the world.

Now this spirit, my brethren, in virtue of which the believer thankfully receives the bounties of his heavenly Father, and yet lives with his affections continually loosened from them, is the result of an inward and thorough change of heart, by the power of the Holy Ghost from on high. That divine Illuminator takes off from the things of life their delusive appearance, and shews them to the servant of God as what they really are ; exposes their momentary character ; lifts his heart to a "better substance ;"§ and leads him to Christ as his chief good, and his portion for ever. If you look, therefore, at the course of the men of this world, upon whom these converting

* I. Cor. vii. 30.

† Col. iii. 2.

‡ I. John, ii. 15.

§ Heb. x. 34.

influences have never been exerted, you find them enjoying, in an exactly opposite manner, the privileges which God scatters on their path. Have they health? They vainly imagine that their sun shall never go down; and turn not a thought to the grave—to a world beyond it—and to all the solemn realities of a judgment to come. Are they blest with abundance? Instead of looking upon wealth as that from which they must soon be separated, they fix their love upon it; they become absorbed in the increase of their riches; and heaven, with all its infinite treasures, is banished from their recollection. All that they have, they accustom themselves to regard as permanent; and thus what was intended for sober use, is the object of a blind and excessive attachment. My believing hearers, you are ready to condemn this inordinate affection for visible things: and yet what is the fact, permit me to inquire, in regard to yourselves? Are *you*, while surrounded with the comforts and the possessions of life, realizing the frail tenure by which you hold them? Do you feel that this is not your rest? Do you continually see, in your imagination, the earth “receding and disappearing,” and eternity, with all its wondrous disclosures, opening upon your vision? This is the spirit which must distinguish you, if you would be deemed consistent Christians. Whatever blessings you possess, set not your hearts upon them: “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.”*

The injunction thus given by St. Paul, respecting a moderated regard for the things of life, he strengthens, as you perceive, by a *motive* of great solemnity. “The Lord,” says he,

* Matt. vi. 20.

"is at hand:" in other words—It should tend to shew you the insignificance of every temporal enjoyment, that the Redeemer of mankind will soon appear, amidst the clouds of heaven, to wind up the scene; and to put an eternal conclusion to all that now engages the affections of the creature, and is the object of his warm pursuit. This advent of the Lord Jesus Christ to judgment is set forth, in several places of the New Testament Epistles, as an inducement not only to a chastened regard for present objects, but to other virtues of the divine life. "The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer."* "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness."† "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."‡ This coming of Christ may be considered as virtually the same with the hour of death; because that decisive event finishes, for ever, the pursuits, pleasures, and concerns, of this world below the skies. To the consideration, then, which is thus held forth by the Apostle, I would for a moment lead your thoughts; and would observe to you, my dear brethren, that the reflection how swiftly that period is approaching, when every sublunary object shall be extinguished, is calculated not merely to lessen your estimate of temporal blessings, but to yield unspeakable consolation under their loss. Are there any among those who hear me this day, the gourd of whose worldly happiness has been withered, like Jonah's, in an hour? Has your property dwindled into nothing? Have your earthly comforts dropped off,

* I. Pet. iv. 7.

† II. Pet. iii. 11.

‡ Heb. x. 25.

like autumnal leaves, and “left you naked and bare?”* What of all this? These good things, with the longest possible enjoyment of them, are but the delights of a day: the Lord himself shall speedily descend to terminate them, “with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God:” and, under this consideration, you may “take joyfully the spoiling of your goods,”† and be comparatively careless how soon you are parted from that which is so fleeting in its duration. This, amidst the privations of the world, is the Christian’s privilege; and it is thus touchingly described in the fine language of Mr. Wilberforce. “The fruits which he sees by the way-side he gathers with caution; he drinks of the streams with moderation; he is thankful when the sun shines, and his way is pleasant; but if it be rough and rainy, he cares not much; he is but a traveller. He is prepared for vicissitudes; he knows that he must expect to meet with them in the stormy and uncertain climate of this world. But he is travelling to ‘a better country,’ a country of unclouded light, and undisturbed serenity.”‡

I proceed to the *third* precept, here enjoined by St. Paul upon the followers of Christ. It cautions them against *improper anxiety, in regard to the events and concerns of the present life*. “Be careful for nothing;” that is, let not your temporal condition—your future lot—or that of those in whom you are interested—be a subject of painful solicitude; “but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.” It is impossible not to be reminded, by these words, of that similar precept delivered by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. “Therefore take

* Ezek. xvi. 39.

† Heb. x. 34.

‡ Practical View. Ch. iv. Sect. 5.

no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, what shall we drink? or, wherewithal shall we be clothed? for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.”* The duty, then, it appears, which the Apostle here urges upon the renewed believer, is that of entrusting all the circumstances of life to the Almighty’s faithful and holy keeping; and, instead of being filled with restless apprehension, to carry every burden, with implicit and grateful confidence, to the throne of divine compassion. To those, my Christian friends, who by faith have tasted a Saviour’s love, and have long known him as the kind Shepherd of his people, this dissuasive against anxious fears might be considered as entirely unnecessary; did you not feel, by painful experience, how deeply the unbelieving and corrupt heart stands in need of line upon line, and precept upon precept, in regard to the plainest duties of the heavenly life. Let us take a few examples, for the purpose of illustration. You are laboring, with every day’s recurrence, in the pursuit of the bread of subsistence. But you are ready to confess, that, though a believer in the guardianship of your reconciled Father in Christ, you are perpetually harassed about the morrow; and, so far from “committing your way unto” Him, in the certainty that “he shall bring it to pass,”† are as full of doubts and terrors, as if you had blotted out the providence of God from among the articles of your faith. You are training up a family for future usefulness and respectability in life. But with these endeavors how much of unbelief is mingled! how much of fretting and anxious thought! how little of that spirit which marked the parents of the infant Moses; and through which you can calmly cast those

* Matt. vi. 31. 32.

† Ps. xxxvii. 5.

you love upon the great waters of the world, and send up your petitions to heaven for their safety ! Such is the inconsistent course of many that profess and call themselves Christians ; and the Apostle has indirectly asserted its great wickedness, when he enjoins, in the words before us, the duty of mingling with your prayers " thanksgiving " for past mercies. It is as if he had said ; With so many former acts of divine care to call to remembrance, how can you, without the deepest ingratitude, distrust your Lord for days to come ; and not rather feel the sweet conviction, that his dealings toward you, in every future period, will be mercy, faithfulness, and truth ? The admonition under review, therefore, may be thus expressed. Use the means which are within your power : pray to the Lord God Almighty for a blessing upon them : and then, in patience and hope, " cast all your care upon him ; for he careth for you."*

It is the blessedness of the precious volume of life, that it so delightfully connects with exhortations to duty, promises of reward to faithful performance. The Apostle has illustrated this feature of God's word, in the verse which follows ; wherein he states *the happiness, flowing from this habitual reference of every concern to the almighty Disposer* : " And the peace of God," he declares, " which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." By the " peace " of which St. Paul here speaks, he means a secret rest and tranquillity ; a settled confidence in the divine favor and protection ; a serene certainty, that all things, being in the Lord's hands, shall " work together for good."† You observe that he terms this feeling one " which passeth all under-

* I. Pet. v. 7.

† Rom. viii. 28.

standing ;" and he intends thereby to say, that not only, being the consequence of regular communion with God by prayer, is it totally unknown by the man of the world, but that even by the believer himself it can never be adequately estimated or expressed. When the Apostle says that this solid reliance upon their heavenly Father "shall keep the hearts and minds" of real believers, he borrows a term from military affairs ; and assures you, that, as soldiers guard a city, and defend it against every enemy, so the sense of security, thus vouchsafed to the Christian, preserves him firm against every harassing fear—every doubt as to the future—every disposition to look with apprehension to the coming destiny, either of himself, or of those for whom he is interested.—It is thus, my brethren, that that course of the servant of God, by which he presents all his various concerns and interests at the footstool of his almighty Governor, is its own sure and blessed recompense ; and perhaps there are some now before me who can testify, from their own experience, to the divine and unspeakable consolation which it has yielded into their hearts. In all the difficulties and the trials of life, you have "lifted up your eyes unto the hills from whence cometh your help :"^{*} you have lived in the continual exercise of prayer : and, in return for this regular, hourly habit of throwing all your burdens upon the Lord, he has taken off the weight from your spirit ; your anxieties have ceased ; and you have been enabled to wait, with cheerful confidence, for the development of events. If this be, indeed, then, the happy result of your compliance with the injunction of the Apostle, proceed, through divine grace, in the same path of filial supplication ; and reap, in all its glorious fulness, that promise of

^{*} Ps. cxxi. 1.

the word of life : "Thou wilt keep him in PERFECT PEACE, whose mind is stayed on thee ; because he trusteth in thee."*

Having thus conveyed to these Philippian believers the admonitions just considered, the Apostle goes on to deliver a *fourth* injunction, of a very general and comprehensive character. "Finally, brethren," he says, "whatsoever things are true," that is, whatever resembles the faithfulness so conspicuous in the divine character ; "whatsoever things are honest," or grave, dignified, and respectable ; "whatsoever things are just," namely, marked with uprightness and strict integrity ; "whatsoever things are pure," that is, chaste and decent ; "whatsoever things are lovely," or, in other words, amiable in the sight of men, and calculated to win their regard and esteem ; "whatsoever things are of good report," or deservedly held in repute in the community ; "if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things ;" or, to express his meaning more clearly : if these qualities and actions are at all excellent and laudable, give them your diligent attention ; and make it your endeavor to exhibit them to a gainsaying world, in your daily walk and conversation.

The general idea contained in these words of St. Paul, is that of the necessary and inseparable connexion between a believer's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the fruits of a holy life : and he here seems, in effect, to say to the converts of Philippi, that the several graces now enumerated are the only satisfactory evidence, that a man has been in fact, as well as in profession, "born again" by the Holy Spirit of God. It will be interesting, my brethren, as well as highly important, to set forth, with reference to the various qualities and

* Isaiah, xxvi. 3.

dispositions here prescribed, the emptiness of every claim to the title of Christ's disciple, unless supported by the confirming testimony of a consistent and spotless example. You have often seen, for instance, those in the community around you, who are nominally the followers of a crucified Saviour, and the members of his spiritual kingdom; but who, at the same time, in their ordinary transactions with their fellow-men, are constantly distinguished by duplicity and equivocation. Can such persons be pronounced the subjects of a Redeemer's grace, and the heirs of his glorious promises? You have beheld other men, with the same pretensions, descending to petty artifices, and low chicanery. Ought we, in the judgment of the largest charity, to regard these as the real servants of the Lord Jesus Christ? Again. You have frequently, in the course of your daily avocations, met with individuals calling themselves Christians, who, while guilty of nothing grossly dishonest, are, nevertheless, ever on the watch to take an unfair advantage; and, in all their dealings, are full of cunning and deep design. Professors of the gospel such as these, may we not reasonably strike from the catalogue of sincere and humble followers of the Son of God? But further. There are some who are numbered among the Lord's people, who are yet notorious, in their conversation, for that impurity which the Apostle has so forcibly styled, "filthy communication out of the mouth."* How are we to allow such to be the disciples of that Master, who is "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners"?† And finally. You not unfrequently see those who declare themselves to be the friends of the Redeemer, who, at the same time, have no

* Col. iii. 8.

† Heb. vii. 26.

mildness and gentleness in their tempers ; display no benevolence to their suffering fellow-beings ; are morose, stern, and selfish ; and do not come up even to the standard of this world, in those dispositions which lend grace and loveliness to the human character. What are we to say, my brethren, of these ? Do they not evince the absence of that grace of Christ, which softens the ruggedness of man's nature ; opens his soul to every benignant and generous affection ; and transforms him into the image of that Saviour, " who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree ?" * The discordance between such practice, and the spiritual faith of the gospel, we cannot but acknowledge : and it was to shew the futility of this professed allegiance to Christ, while unproductive of a marked influence upon the daily deportment, that St. Paul uttered the exhortation before us. " Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." † " If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." ‡ " As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." §

In the *last* admonition here given by the Apostle, he advises his Philippian brethren, as he had done in a former part of the Epistle, to cultivate all those graces and dispositions which had been taught them by his own lips, and exemplified in his own practice. " Those things," says he, " which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do ;" and he then sets before them the blessing, by which such a career would be accompanied : " and the God of peace shall be with you ;" he shall comfort you with the

* I. Pet. ii. 24. † Matt. vii. 21. ‡ Rom. viii. 9. § James, ii. 26.

sense of his favor ; give you joy in believing ; and sustain you with an abiding expectation of coming glory.

I need not assure those who have been conducted, by divine grace, into the newness of the spiritual life, that to all those various qualities and affections which St. Paul exhibited, and which real Christians after him manifest, the Father in heaven does, as we are here informed, yield a rich recompense of consolation. Are you filled, like the great Apostle, with gratitude of heart towards the blessed Author and Finisher of your salvation ? You can bear me witness, then, that in this attachment you have found your reward ; and that, in the sweet consciousness of pardoned sin, and of reconciliation with the God whom you had offended, you are now "rejoicing with joy unspeakable, and full of glory."* Are you acquiescing, like him, with patient submission, in the appointments of a wise and merciful Providence ? Here, also, you have reaped a harvest of spiritual comfort. Amidst the deprivations of this world, you have been uplifted with the prospects of another ; and, through all varieties of experience, are stayed upon that hope which is "as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast."† I might illustrate the correctness of St. Paul's representation, with reference to all the other graces of the Christian calling : and demonstrate, from this union of obedience with delight and satisfaction, the unequalled felicity of *their* portion, who have renounced the world, taken up their cross, and determined, through all their days, to follow Christ in the regeneration. What better encouragement do you need ? "Your joy no man taketh from you."‡ "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life

* I. Pet. i. 8.

† Heb. vi. 19.

‡ John, xvi. 22.

that now is, and of that which is to come.”* “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you : not as the world giveth, give I unto you.”† “All things are yours ; life, or death, or things present, or things to come ; all are yours ; and ye are Christ’s ; and Christ is God’s.”‡

* I. Tim. iv. 8.

† John, xiv. 27.

‡ I. Cor. iii. 21—23.

LECTURE XVII.

CHAPTER IV. 10—16.

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again ; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want : for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound : every where, and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. Notwithstanding, ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now, ye Philippians, know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.

It is, almost invariably, one of the characteristic features of a great mind, to be willing to acknowledge an obligation ; and when this mind has been touched by the renewing influences of a Redeemer's grace, the quality thus manifested in the natural man shines still more brightly in the disciple of Jesus

Christ. And it must be observed, that this spirit of grateful simplicity, by which the heart is ready to confess benefits received, is very far removed from grovelling and servile adulation. It is a meek, affectionate, and thankful disposition, leading the believer to express, not only without shame, but with cheerfulness and delight, the debt of love which he has contracted, through the goodness of a fellow-man. Such was the noble feeling which impelled St. Paul, before closing this Epistle to the Christians of Philippi, to convey to them his sense of their remarkable benevolence towards himself. The subject of kind attentions from distant friends, he hastens to utter his returning testimony; and takes pleasure in recording, as we have once before seen him doing,* the attachment that remembered him in his sorrows, and visited him with seasonable supplies.

The precise act of benevolence which the Apostle here takes occasion to commemorate, is the mission of Epaphroditus from Philippi to Rome, with a sum of money to alleviate the miseries of his imprisonment. "But I rejoiced," he says, "in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again," or, has begun to revive; as, in the season of spring, a plant puts forth its buds again, after the long barrenness of winter. And not only does St. Paul thus express his gratitude for the bounty of his brethren, but he also apologizes, in the most delicate manner, for their delay in administering to his wants. "Wherein," he tells them, "ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity:" it appears, therefore, that though the Philippians had not, so soon as might have been expected, communicated aid to this captive servant

* See Lecture x.

of the Lord Jesus Christ, it had been because of their inability either to raise the necessary amount, or to find a suitable person through whom to forward it to the Roman capital.

In this expression of St. Paul's thankfulness to those, who, having had "spiritual things sown unto them" by his ministry, had in return imparted to him of their "carnal things,"* there is one feature of character displayed, to which I would particularly lead your attention. You perceive that, in declaring his obligations to them for the gift which they had conferred, he uses this language; "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly:" and it appears, from these words, that, while he recognized the Philippians as the friends by whom his wants had been relieved, he, at the same time, traced the benevolent spirit which had actuated them, and the results by which it had been followed, *primarily to the gracious providence of his Creator and Redeemer*. The disposition of the Apostle was to consider men as but instruments in the hands of God; and to regard every benefit conferred by them as flowing from Him, who is "the author and giver of all good things."† The tendency thus manifested by the renewed heart to ascend beyond secondary causes, and ascribe all its blessings to the Fountain of mercy, is exceedingly worthy of your attention; because it constitutes one remarkable point of difference between the real Christian, and the mere man of the world. There are probably many, among those who now hear me, who, in various acts of friendship from others which have conduced to their prosperity and advantage, have never yet discerned the interposition of the Lord God Almighty; and, instead of being supremely thankful to Him to whom gra-

* I. Cor. ix. 11.

† Collect for Seventh Sunday after Trinity.

itude was due, have expended all their affections upon earthly and subordinate agents. Divine grace leads to a far different train of thought and feeling. In every instance of human kindness, the believer sees the finger of heaven; and, acknowledging the Lord as the merciful Disposer, looks upon all others as nothing more than the channels, selected by this beneficent Being for the conveyance of his gifts. How delightfully is this habitual recognition of Providence, in the various blessings of existence, exhibited by the saints of Scripture! Joseph, exalted by Pharaoh to a station second only to royalty itself, thus exclaims to his brethren; "Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt."* Ezra, expressing his joy at that decree of the monarch of Persia, by which the chosen people were permitted to return to the land of Judah, in this manner confesses the source of their privileges; "Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem."† St. Paul, consoled by the edifying conversation of a Christian brother, glorifies the Giver of all good, and cries, "God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus."‡ These examples, combined with that of the words under consideration, speak an instructive lesson. They enjoin upon you, my brethren, the duty of being grateful to human friends, but more thankful still to the God under whose suggestions they act; and bid you, while you honor and love your earthly benefactors, never to forget that unseen and heavenly Father, "who giveth you richly all things to enjoy."§

* Gen. xlv. 9.

† Ezra, vii. 27.

‡ II. Cor. vii. 6.

§ I. Tim. vi. 17.

From this expression of thankfulness for the supply of his necessities, it might have been inferred by some, that the Apostle had been restless under the privations he suffered; and that the gifts conveyed by the Philippian church had suddenly awakened him from a state of gloomy dejection, into cheerfulness of mind. He is anxious to guard against such an idea, and against the evil consequences to which it might lead; and, accordingly, declares

In the *first* place, that he had acquired the divine art of acquiescing, with entire willingness, in the appointments of an almighty Providence, whatever they might be. "Not that I speak," observes St. Paul, "in respect of want;" that is, do not imagine that, because I rejoice in any mitigation of my sorrows, I therefore have been miserable beneath the condition assigned to me: "for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." There is something singularly delightful to contemplate, in the example of submission to the divine dealings here exhibited to your view. Imprisoned, deprived of the common comforts of life, and, above all, taken from his accustomed opportunities of usefulness to the church and to the world, he, nevertheless, bows with meekness to the dispensation; and is sustained by the conviction, that all which the Judge of the earth doeth must be in justice, goodness, and mercy. That part of the Apostle's declaration, however, which is particularly worthy of study, is his description of the true nature of this resigned spirit, amidst all the varieties of human fortune. He tells us, you perceive, that it was a state of mind "learned" from above: a principle of acquiescence produced by divine grace in the heart of the believer; and leading him, on spiritual grounds, to yield to every arrange-

ment of infinite wisdom. It is evident, therefore, my brethren, that Christian contentment is a feeling very different from that species of submission to their destiny, which is so frequently displayed by mere men of the world. Persons such as these, finding that there is no escape from the situation in which Providence has placed them, sit down in a sort of stoical apathy; and resolve, that, instead of wearing out life with useless repinings, they will bear with tranquillity that which it is impossible to avoid. The quality portrayed by St. Paul, and which is exhibited by the real servant of God, is not this compelled resignation; but a principle of enlightened satisfaction with the appointments of heaven, implanted by the Holy Spirit in his soul. The joy thus experienced by the renewed disciple, amidst the sorrows and adverse circumstances of life, proceeds from several considerations. He feels himself a 'sinner against God; and, when he examines his own unworthiness, he is brought to the reflection, that even the most unpromising condition to which his heavenly Father can subject him, is far superior to his deserts. Again. He places before his eye the loveliness and excellence of the divine character: he feels, that what the King of kings, and Lord of lords orders, however contrary to his own wishes, and painful to flesh and blood, cannot be otherwise than perfectly compassionate, and perfectly wise: and, with the Psalmist, delights to say, "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof."* In addition to these two grounds of acquiescence, he finds a third in that view which he takes, by faith, of a world of happiness to come. He looks upward for his home; he is certain that

* Ps. xcvi. 1.

here he cannot find it ; and, in expectation of that rest which God hath prepared for those who love him, sustains cheerfully the buffetings and trials of his pilgrimage. It is from such motives, that the Christian, through divine grace, is led to receive with pleasure every thing which the supreme Disposer ordains ; and those of you, my hearers, who are influenced by the converting Spirit of God, will, under all circumstances, be thus minded. Your feeling will be that of Eli ; “ It is the Lord : let him do what seemeth him good.”* It will be that of Job ; “ Blessed be the name of the Lord.”† It will be that of St. Paul ; “ I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”

Having thus, in order to remove any supposition that he was discontented with his lot, declared his tranquil submission to trial, the Apostle proceeds, *secondly*, to express the same idea in a more enlarged form. “ I know,” he exclaims, “ both how to be abased, and I know how to abound : every where, and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” The word rendered “ I am instructed,” is one that was used by the Greeks, in reference to persons who were initiated into their sacred mysteries : and is here beautifully employed by St. Paul to denote that secret life of faith in the soul, into which the Christian has been led by conversion ; and through which he has learned how to comport himself with propriety, under every change of outward circumstances in this present world. Through this experimental acquaintance with the power of religion, the Apostle was enabled, as he now informs us, to pass unhurt through the temptations of humbling poverty on

* I. Sam. iii. 18.

† Job, i. 21.

the one hand, and of comfortable plenty on the other. When he was visited by Providence with penury, he could abstain from repinings, and from hard thoughts of God: and when he had worldly goods in profusion, he was not led away into luxurious indulgence; pride; and love of this present corruptible and fleeting scene of things. I have already illustrated, while considering the preceding verse, that disposition of the believer, by which he bears with meek resignation the adverse dispensations of heaven. Let me now, from the declaration here made by the Apostle, call your attention to that part of the Christian's character, by which he preserves a sustained and balanced spirit, amidst a fulness of worldly possessions. My dear Christian friends, permit me to ask you, as professed followers of the Redeemer, to take the representation of St. Paul as a standard; and to bring to a comparison with it your own spirit and deportment, while journeying to an eternal country. While blessed by a gracious Providence with abundance of earthly riches, are you, through divine grace, living in a humble consciousness of your own demerit; without haughtiness, and without pride; and sensible that it is the Lord only, who thus "maketh you to differ?"* While furnished with the ready means of gratifying your inclinations, are you ardently, and in the spirit of prayer, resisting the allurements which beset your path? Are you "living soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world?"† Or, in wicked abuse of all your blessings, are you wasting them in the service of frivolity and sin; making base compromises with the worldly; going over to their ranks; deserting your Master's standard; following the multitude to do evil; and per-

* I. Cor. iv. 7.

† Titus, ii. 12.

forming that most inconsistent of all courses, to live as others live, and yet claim the privileges of a Saviour's religion, surround the table of his love, and look forward to the everlasting glories of his kingdom? If there be a spectacle on earth truly sublime, it is that of a Christian believer, having all the means of worldly conformity within his reach, and yet adhering to the narrow way; and pressing onward, with undiverted step, to a city in the skies. But if there is grandeur in such a spirit, how rarely, my brethren, is it attained! How true now, as before, that saying of the best of all witnesses, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!"* To be called the Lord's people appears pleasant to them; heaven seems desirable in their eyes; but they find it too difficult a requisition, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."†

After these observations of the blessed Apostle, in regard to the spirit by which he was actuated, he proceeds, with all humility and meekness, to point out the source from which his ability had been derived. Mark the declaration which he utters. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." There is something exceedingly characteristic in this brief sentence. He had just been expressing the steady and unruffled mind which he was able to maintain, amidst the two opposite states of emptiness and fulness. But, lest he should thereby seem, in the eyes of those to whom he was writing, to deserve any honor for this enviable frame of soul, he hastens to place the crown upon the proper head; and refers his tranquil submission under captivity and sorrow, his lowliness under brighter dispensations, and every grace and

* Luke, xviii. 24.

† Matt. xvi. 24.

virtue by which he was distinguished, only to the sanctifying influences of the Lord Jesus upon his heart. There is, perhaps, no one feature more conspicuous in this great Apostle of Christ, than his eagerness to trace up all the excellencies of the believer's character to the Holy Spirit of God. He allows no room for self to advance a claim. To the free gift of the Redeemer all is referred. Whatever is evil, he ascribes to his own corrupt heart; whatever is good, is made the subject of thankfulness to that almighty Lord, whose strength was "made perfect in weakness."* Hear his language to the Corinthians; "I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."† Mark his exclamation to the Galatians; "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."‡ While you may learn, my brethren, in these expressions, and in the assertion now under review, the unfeigned lowliness of the real servant of Christ, may they not very properly, also, suggest strong ground of encouragement, to any among you who are lamenting the absence of those various graces, which adorn the Christian character? If the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ would thus arm the Apostle with firmness in prosperity, and give him patience and cheerfulness in darker visitations, he can do the same in all respects for you. Approach his mercy-seat; ask to be delivered from that fretting heart, which cannot endure the appointments of heaven; pray for his influences against the perilous assaults of wealth, and worldly custom, and human opinion. The ability which

* II. Cor. xii. 9.

† I. Cor. xv. 10.

‡ Gal. ii. 20.

now you possess not shall infallibly descend ; without Him you can do nothing ; but with him, all things are possible. "He giveth power to the faint ; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength."*

Having thus made a digression, for the purpose of expressing to the Philippians his contentment beneath the calamities which he suffered, St. Paul returns, in the last three verses of the portion before us, to his commendation of their affectionate attentions. "Notwithstanding," he says, "ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction." He commemorates this liberality towards him, as an evidence of the Christian love of his brethren ; and then proceeds to hold them up as singularly conspicuous examples, among those by whom they were surrounded. "Now, ye Philippians," he exclaims, "know also, that in the beginning of the gospel," namely, at the period when St. Paul first preached to them the unsearchable riches of Christ, "when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity." In these words, the Apostle goes back from the period at which he was writing, to days long departed ; and states the fact, that those same children of the Lord who had just manifested the kindness of their hearts, had always been signalized for their active interest in the promotion of his comfort, and in the alleviation of his sufferings and privations. Among the primitive churches they had stood alone, in this particular respect ; or, even if it was the case, that the bounty of others besides them had been proffered to St. Paul, but, for certain reasons, refused, still the willingness

* Isaiah, xl. 29.

of the Philippians thus to bear the burden of his support was, every way, deserving of the tribute of his heartiest gratitude.

In the representation here made, it is difficult to know, my brethren, which most to love and to admire; the attachment of these early converts to the "minister by whom they had believed,"* or his own long-cherished remembrance of the benefits of other years. How strongly does this feeling recollection, exhibited by the Apostle, stand in contrast with the cold, selfish, and heartless spirit of the world! In the progress of life, favors are buried in oblivion; new friendships eradicate those of earlier times; and, amidst the bustle and distraction of daily occupations, the tenderest bonds of union are severed without regard. The records of the Bible, and the annals of Christian experience, both teach us clearly, that the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ is the only school of deep and refined sensibility. Made alive to his obligations to redeeming love; and habitually dwelling upon the remembrance of his divine Master's sacrifice, the believer becomes moulded into a frame of gratitude towards all that have a claim upon his affections. The lapse of time strengthens the character of his attachments; they are continually taking deeper root; and, at the termination, equally as at the beginning of his career, shew that they are derived from a feeling which "many waters cannot quench," and which "the floods cannot drown."†

You have thus surveyed, in regular order, those attractive Christian graces, exhibited to view in the verses which have now been illustrated. You have seen the Apostle, with heavenly mind, tracing up every stream of earthly consolation to the Fountain of love and mercy. You have seen him;

* I. Cor. iii. 5.

† Song of Solomon, viii. 7.

amidst the varied sorrows of his condition, lying meekly and gently at the divine disposal ; desiring to have no will but that of his reconciled Father in Christ ; and prepared alike for every form of ignominy and privation. You have marked the spirit with which he was furnished, to carry him through the perils of prosperous days. You have beheld the prostrate humility of soul, with which he recognises the Source of all his attainments in the heavenly life. You have seen him delighting to recall to memory, after long intervening periods, the benefactions of those friends, whom the Lord Jesus Christ had given him as the seals of his ministry, and the comforters of his woe. My dear hearers, how impressively do all these qualities, produced by the quickening grace of God in the heart of St. Paul, present themselves to our eyes in view of that hallowed table,* around which we are so shortly to be gathered ! How solemn and serious are the reflections which they force upon the mind ! In how clear a light do they place the obligations devolving upon those, who are the professed servants of a crucified Saviour in this lower world ! In remembrance, therefore, of what has now passed before us, may we not all with propriety address to ourselves the question—Have I this inward and grateful consciousness of a controlling and merciful Providence, as the source of my blessings ? Am I possessed, in any reasonable measure, of this divine contentment beneath the evils of life ? Am I thus maintaining my ground, against the allurements of worldly fortune ? Do I, instead of resting, with Pharisaic complacency upon my personal merits, regularly look upward to the Lord Jesus Christ, as my “wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption ?”† Am

* Communion Sunday.

† 1. Cor. i. 30.

I, the subject of heavenly and earthly favors, filled with the lively recollection of them ; and distinguished from others by the ornament of a thankful, affectionate, and unalterable love ? —If, with all humility, we can feel such to be our blessed experience, let us approach, with happy step, this banquet of heavenly refreshment. It is here that the servants of Christ look for strength by the way, and here, blessed be God, that they shall surely find it. At the feast of his love, the Redeemer graciously meets his people ; gives them new joy and peace in believing ; and communicates to them fresh supplies of that Spirit, which is in them “ a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”* Enjoy the board which he has provided. It is one of the sweet privileges of your calling. “ My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.”†

* John, iv. 14.

† John, vi. 55. 56.

LECTURE XVIII.

CHAPTER IV. 17—23.

Not because I desire a gift : but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound : I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you. All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Cesar's household. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

THE continuance of his allusions to the bounty of his Philippian brethren, and the expression of his affectionate wishes for their welfare, occupy these concluding verses of the Apostle's letter. At the first sight of those brief valedictory expressions which are here uttered, you might be disposed to imagine that there was nothing in them requiring any particular attention ; as being only the customary forms of civility between friend and friend. There is something, however, even in the ordinary courtesies of a real Christian, which is

marked and peculiar; and so eminently is this the fact in regard to the saints of the New Testament, that they afford us instruction while speaking of topics, in themselves the most trivial and uninteresting. You will perceive the truth of this observation, by following St. Paul through that closing portion of his Epistle, on which your meditations are this morning to be employed.

In some of the verses preceding those upon which we now enter, the Apostle had, as you have seen, been expressing his gratitude for that plentiful assistance, by which the Philippians had administered to his wants. He now proceeds to set forth the principal reason, for which he rejoiced in this instance of their goodness; and states that his joy was derived not from selfish and interested motives, but from the satisfactory evidence which their good works afforded, in the sight of God and man, that their religion was active and sincere. "Not because I desire a gift," he declares; or, as the meaning might be more exactly expressed, not because the gift sent me is the object upon which my heart is fixed; "but I desire fruit that may abound to your account:" that is, it is my ardent wish that you may exhibit those proofs of faith, which shall be regarded with pleasure by the Lord, at the day of final reckoning. The Apostle intends to say, therefore, to his friends at Philippi, that "he sought not theirs, but them;"* but the words before us contain a doctrine of great importance, upon which we may profitably, for a few moments, dwell. St. Paul's expression of a desire, that these Christian brethren might manifest such deeds of benevolence, as would redound to their advantage at the consummation of all things, implies

* II. Cor. xii. 14.

very clearly one truth : that the good works of the believer, though not in the least meritorious of salvation, yet, as being the fruits and evidences of a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, are received with acceptance by our heavenly Father. This position is asserted as plainly as possible in the verse which follows. "But I have all," declares the Apostle, "and abound : I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God." Allusion is here made, as you observe, to the offerings under the law ; and the words of St. Paul convey the idea, that those acts of love to the brethren which spring from a spiritual principle within, rise as a grateful oblation to the Lord Almighty. Declarations of a similar import, and also in similar language, are found in other parts of the New Testament volume. "To do good, and to communicate," says the Apostle to the Hebrews, "forget not : for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."* "Ye also," says St. Peter, "as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."†

There are two cardinal errors, my brethren, into one or the other of which, through the corruption of the human heart, men have ever been seen to fall. They have either, in the spirit of pride and self-righteousness, ascribed merit and efficacy to the mere performance of deeds of charity, and acts of outward virtue ; thus completely rendering void that atoning sacrifice of Christ, whereby alone the sinner can be restored to favor : or, on the other hand, under the pretence of magnifying the free grace of God, they have wickedly denied the

* Heb. xiii. 16.

† I. Pet. ii. 5.

necessity of any fruits of holiness; and abused the doctrine of the Redeemer's all-sufficiency, to the encouragement either of licentiousness of practice, or of a career marked by no active deeds of benevolence and love. To neither of these capital heresies, does the language of the Apostle afford the least degree of countenance; but, avoiding the opposite extremes of antinomianism, and legal justification, declares that the Lord of mercy beholds with satisfaction those good works, which are the offspring of a lively and vigorous faith implanted by divine grace within the heart. These fruits in the conduct God imperiously requires, as being the only legitimate proof of genuine religion. He smiles upon them with joy. He honors them as the marks of that principle of new life in the soul, by which the believer takes the Lord Jesus Christ as the object of his constant love, and daily imitation.

Little worth, then, my beloved brethren, as we are bound to regard the simple performance of an outward morality, equally bound are we to judge of faith only by its fruits; and to say to every professed believer, in the language of St. James, "Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works."* This doctrine, accordingly, of the necessity, and the acceptable character, of those deeds by which a Christian proves the sincerity of his profession, is plainly recognised by our Church; when, in one of her Collects, she thus speaks: "Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may by thee be plenteously rewarded, through Jesus Christ our Lord."† And equally clear is the language of her Twelfth Article; where it is said, "Albeit

* James, ii. 18.

† Collect for Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity.

that good works, which are the fruits of faith, and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgment; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith; insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known, as a tree discerned by the fruit." In compliance with these wholesome views, let us all, my hearers, in dependence upon the grace of God, shew forth before men the reality of a Christian's love for his crucified Master. Let us do good in every possible form; and then ascribe all the merit, and all the glory of our deeds, to that Lord and Saviour through whose Spirit alone they have been produced. Through this course of holy obedience, we may look forward with humble hope for our recompense of reward; and attain for ourselves in due season, if we labor and faint not, a share in that blessed welcome; "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

From the mention of these contributions, by which his brethren had displayed their liberality to him in his necessities, the Apostle immediately passes to an observation full of comfort and encouragement. "But my God," he exclaims, "shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus:" in other words; Let me say to you, that your course of faith and love shall not be without its blessing; and the Father who is in heaven, out of the fulness of his treasures, shall provide for your every want: sustain you with temporal good things: and minister to you the still richer communications of his gracious Spirit.

It is easy for us, my brethren, to imagine the consolation

* Matt. xxv. 23.

which St. Paul would feel, in thus committing his kind benefactors into the hands of a faithful Creator. He was conscious, that, so far as their reward depended upon himself, they had nothing to expect : and, therefore, with cheerfulness cast them upon that merciful Providence, who watches over his servants for good, and “ feeds them with food convenient.”* The declaration here made by the Apostle is important, as stating unequivocally the truth, *that the Almighty’s believing people may look for his aid and presence, through all the periods of their pilgrimage.* You observe the confidence with which he makes this observation : he consigns his friends to God, with perfect certainty as to the result : and, in this respect, entirely accords with all the representations of the Volume of life. Let us bring forward some few of the promises of God’s word, relating to the *temporal* comforts of the believer. “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”† “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”‡ “Trust in the Lord, and do good: so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.”§ Upon the authority of such assurances as these, all that remains for the children of God is to go on steadily in the path of duty ; to look up to the Father, through Christ, as a reconciled Friend and Parent , and to obey, love, and glorify him ; and, while they are thus doing, to believe that all necessary things, in the Lord’s goodness and mercy, shall be poured into their bosom. Who ever counted, in this manner, upon the supply of his necessities, and found the expectation disappointed ? Hear the testimony of dying Jacob : “The God which fed me all my life long unto this day.”|| Listen to the

* Prov. xxx. 8. † Ps. xxiii. 1. ‡ Matt. vi. 33. § Ps. xxxvii. 3. || Gen. xlviii. 15.

Psalmist's experience : " I have been young, and now am old ; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."* But, my brethren, there are wants besides those of the body ; and it is cheering to perceive, that, in regard to all his *spiritual* necessities, the believer is sustained, through the whole series of the pages of life, with the same abundant declarations. Do you tremble at the power of temptation ; and wish for strength from on high to preserve you firm against its assaults ? The Father of mercies shall here supply your need ; for he himself has given you the assurance, " God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able ; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."† Do you thirst for more ardent love to Christ ; for more entire victory over the world ; for a more complete conformity to the divine word, in your affections, tempers, and daily lives ? All these things, precious as they are, the Lord of heaven shall bestow ; they are covenanted to you in Christ Jesus ; and there is not a principle of the divine life—not a support in sorrow—not a grace of true holiness—which is not promised to you on the infallible testimony of your Lord and your God. " I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever."‡ " Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."§ " If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him ?"|| These, then, are your prospects, as the servants of Christ. Only come to God through faith in his Son, and he takes you as his adopted children : he will continue to

* Ps. xxxvii. 25. † I. Cor. x. 13. ‡ John, xiv. 16. § John, xvi. 24. || Luke, xi. 13.

you, through life, the blessings of his providence and grace : and you shall find, in the largest sense, the prediction to be true, "They that seek the Lord SHALL NOT WANT ANY GOOD THING."*

Having thus travelled over the whole range of topics, upon which he desired to speak to his Philippian friends, the Apostle brings them all to a close by a solemn ascription of praise. "Now," he exclaims, "unto God and our Father," or, as it might, perhaps, with more accuracy be rendered, "unto our God and Father, be glory for ever and ever. Amen." There is, probably, in this expression of honor to the Lord and Governor of the universe, something more intended than, at first sight, we might be disposed to imagine. One of the objects which St. Paul had in view, in the present Epistle to his absent friends, was to convey to them his deep sense of their liberality in the supply of his wants. This instance of their Christian love he had just been commemorating, in very exalted terms : and you will easily perceive, my brethren, that there was some danger in such an expression of commendation, from a person so distinguished in character and office. The minds of those to whom he wrote might, without some caution, have become vain and self-complacent ; and, instead of being duly thankful to that divine grace which had inspired them with these good desires, might have forgotten the Creator in wicked idolatry of the creature. With well-timed regard, therefore, for the spiritual safety of his brethren, St. Paul leads them to that divine Author, who had made them to be what they were ; and counsels them to give to Him alone, and to his great name, the acknowledgment that was due.

* Ps. xxxiv. 10.

There can certainly be no habit, my brethren, more eminently calculated than that which is here enforced, to keep alive within the heart of the Christian a spirit of humility and self-renunciation. Let us ever bear in mind, that all which the believer has and is, proceeds purely from the free grace and mercy of God, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Let us remember, that it is grace which has achieved the work of his redemption, from the guilt and punishment of sin; that it is the Spirit of truth which first communicates to him a justifying faith, and changes him from darkness to light; and that it is this same heavenly Illuminator, by whose power he thinks every holy thought, and performs every excellent deed, from the beginning to the termination of his career. By this salutary course of reflection, we shall be preserved in a frame of lowly gratitude; and those fruits of holiness which, through divine aid, we are enabled to exhibit, so far from being fuel for vanity, will only serve to deepen our consciousness of absolute dependence upon God. Such was the spirit which St. Paul desired to cherish, in the minds of those primitive converts; and, with the same view, let us, also, carry about, as the constant principle of our lives, the Psalmist's motto, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory!"*

The affectionate Apostle now adds, to all that he had said, a few expressions of regard on the part of himself, and of those with whom he was connected. "Salute," says he, "every saint in Christ Jesus;" that is, every member of your small community of renewed and sanctified believers. "The brethren," he continues, "which are with me greet you."

* Ps. cxv. 1.

referring, in these words, to those ministering servants of God who were his companions at Rome ; and who were faithfully laboring, according to their ability, in the dissemination of gospel truth. He then conveys the friendly wishes of the other Christians around him ; and writes, "All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Cesar's household." From these expressions, then, you learn the remarkable fact, that, even among the inhabitants of the imperial palace, there were found some who were witnesses for God, and for the religion of his blessed Son. The person who swayed the sceptre at this time, was the vindictive and bloody Nero ; but who these converts to Christ were, to whom the Apostle thus briefly refers, we have no certain information. Whoever they may have been, and whether in a high or subordinate rank of life, their profession of the gospel was certainly no common testimony to the power of the grace of God. They stood forth as the friends and servants of the Redeemer, not only in the face of those temptations which are always to be found, amidst scenes of worldly splendor and magnificence ; but also at the hazard of their lives, from the cruelty of a persecuting and relentless tyrant. The mention of such Christian brethren to the Philippian disciples, was calculated, in a high degree, to encourage their hearts, and confirm them in the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ ; and it was certainly, therefore, a providential circumstance, that St. Paul had this opportunity, in his closing expressions, thus particularly to bring these members of the imperial family into view.

And it may not be unprofitable, my brethren, here to indulge a passing reflection upon that goodness of God, by which he selects occasionally, in places where we should least

have looked for them, persons to acknowledge his name, and advocate his cause before men. Such examples are animating for the Christian to behold. They strengthen his confidence as to the divine power of a religion, which can thus triumph over all obstacles of outward situation, and over circumstances least propitious to the rise and progress of the life of God. In how bright and glorious a character does faith present itself to your view, when leading Moses to "refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter," and to "esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt!"* With what plainness does its reality appear, when sustaining Daniel amidst the temptations of royalty, and against the assaults of malignant persecution from the great ones of the earth! These, and similar instances on the page of history, are special and peculiar encouragements to the Christian traveller, as he pursues his journey, through a scoffing generation, to the world of glory. They teach him, with demonstration not to be resisted, that it must be the Spirit of God, which thus raises up defenders of the cause of Jehovah in the strongest holds of the adversary. He infers rightly, that they who can successfully contend against the blandishments and seductions of the world, in their most captivating form, must be furnished with weapons from on high. He is stimulated by the spectacle: he goes on his way rejoicing: he lays hold, with greater alacrity than ever, upon the everlasting refuge "set before him"† in the gospel. For such exemplifications, then, of the omnipotence of grace, let us thank our heavenly Father; and bless his holy name, that he has

* Heb. xi. 24. 26.

† Heb. vi. 18.

not left himself without witnesses for his glory, even "in king's houses!"*

The Apostle finishes his letter with the benediction, with which we meet so frequently on other occasions. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," he says, "be with you all. Amen:"—and I may here, my brethren, in like manner, be permitted to utter a prayer for *your* spiritual and eternal welfare, at the close of this expository series, upon which, during the past season, we have been employed. It may truly be said, that they who, with the least measure of sincerity, preach their Master's gospel to a dying world, never descend from the pulpit without feelings of deep and awful solemnity. They connect what has been there delivered with the effects which it was intended, through divine grace, to produce, upon the hearts of those who have listened to the message. They consider, with affectionate interest, the responsibilities of every individual hearer of the word of life. They follow him, in imagination, to the world beyond the grave—they view him at the bar of final account—and call to mind, with anxious hopes and fears, that declaration of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."†

Particularly, then, may such feelings be expected to pervade the mind of him who now addresses you, at the conclusion of a consecutive course of instruction, such as that with which our common meditations have, for a few months, been occupied. In the illustration of this beautiful Epistle, you have been

* Matt. xi. 8.

† John, xii. 48.

conducted, my beloved friends, to the pure and unadulterated word of life and peace. You have been furnished with an exhibition of divine truth, precisely as it came forth from the Author of all good; with doctrines, exactly as the inspiration of God's holy Spirit has stated them; with lessons of Christian practice and duty, delivered by the great Head of the church speaking through his own commissioned Apostle. After such a display of the living oracles of God, in the regular and established ministrations of the sanctuary, may not each attendant upon these courts of the Lord properly reflect, with seriousness of soul, upon the obligations under which he has been placed; and inwardly pray to the Fountain of all wisdom, that the word thus preached may be to him "a savour," not "of death unto death," but "of life unto life?"* The day is approaching, on rapid wing, when, for all these privileges and blessings, the subjects of them shall be summoned to strictest requisition; and, at that solemn hour, where shall be found the careless, the trifling, the lukewarm, or the self-conceited listener, to these successive proclamations of truth? God grant, my brethren, that to you the message of mercy which is here preached, may not be preached in vain! May He for whom we sow the seed, and who alone can grant the increase, vouchsafe to you his illuminating Spirit in large supplies! May he advance you, by regular steps, in every Christian attainment; sanctify you ever more and more through the use of his appointed means of grace; and bring you at last, in his own good time, to that better world, where "the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces:"† where "the

* II. Cor. ii. 16.

† Isai. xxv. 8.

Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters :”* where “the Lord shall be unto them an everlasting light, and their God their glory !”†

* Rev. vii. 17.

† Isai. lx. 19.

THE END.



